HILDA

MARY E. IRELAND

Joan from Aunt Lo
and Uncle Joe.

Hilda's Mascot

"YOU LITTLE VIXEN!" CRIED JERUSHA. "YOU SEE THERE IS NOTHING UNDER THERE!"

HILDA'S MASCOT

A TALE OF
"MARYLAND, MY MARYLAND"

By

MARY E. IRELAND

MADE IN U. S. A.

THE
SAALFIELD PUBLISHING CO.
Chicago AKRON, OHIO New York

COPYRIGHT, MCMXXVII,
BY
THE SAALFIELD PUBLISHING COMPANY

HILDA'S MASCOT

CHAPTER I

THE EBONY BOX

One evening many years ago a man, accompanied by a girl and a boy, was passing slowly along one of the streets of Baltimore that led to an orphan asylum.

He was above medium height, and although past thirty, was youthful, almost boyish in appearance, with his fair complexion, blonde hair and slight moustache; a handsome man save for the pallor and attentuation of his clear-cut features and the look of hopeless grief in his fine eyes.

His left hand, white and shapely, held that of the little boy who was chatting merrily, and in his right was a package—of which, though bulky, he appeared as oblivious as though his hand were empty.

Beside him walked the girl, whose watchful interest in the package betokened ownership, though intrusted for a time to another's care, but for the safety of which she was responsible.

She had the clear olive complexion, black hair and the brilliant black eyes of the boy, but unlike him, was thin and almost as pallid as the man. But there was no lassitude in her movements; instead they were full of energy, and her meagre face, while intelligent and attractive, lacked repose and the promise of patient endurance of life's trials and disappointments.

"We never were on this street before," she commented, after walking several squares in silence. "Where are we going; tell me?"

There was no response, and she continued, "Does mamma know that you are taking Horace and me away from her? Why don't you talk?"

A sigh, almost a groan, escaped the lips of the man, and he whispered some words which the children did not understand.

An angry flush arose to the girl's face, and her eyes sparkled with the tears that filled them.

"I won't go one step further unless you tell me where we are going," she said, halting and stamping her foot impatiently.

The man seemed to rouse from his abstraction with effort, and in a voice scarcely audible to the eager listener, replied, "We are going where you will see many children, where you will have enough to eat, a comfortable bed and good clothes; you will have a much better home than the one you are leaving."

"But I have good clothes now and pretty ones," and she looked with an air of satisfaction upon the package. "Will mamma come?"

The man trembled with suppressed emotion, which was noticed by the boy, who looked up into his face and waited for the answer.

"Your mother will be given a home where she will suffer no more sorrow nor distress of body or mind," he answered, and again relapsed into silence until they reached the asylum, were admitted and stood in the presence of the matron.

"Have you brought these children for admission?" she asked.

The man nodded; he could not summon voice to speak.

"Where is your permit?"

For answer he turned as quickly as his weakness would allow, placed the package upon a chair and left the building.

"Well, this is a strange proceeding, I must say," commented the matron, looking from the window at the retreating figure passing down the walk with uncertain steps. "Is that man your father?"

Something in the tone and manner aroused the quick temper of the girl and she refused to answer, and silenced the boy by a look when appeal was made to him.

"What is your name?" continued the matron, turning again to her.

"Jerusha Flint."

"How old are you?"

"Ten last June."

"Is the boy your brother?"

"Yes."

"What is his name and age?"

"Horace Flint, and six years."

"Where is your mother?" was next asked.

"At home, sick."

"Who sent you here?"

"Nobody; we came to have a good home and plenty to eat. I have pretty clothes in there; I helped mamma make them," and she nodded complacently toward the package on the chair.

"You helped indeed," smiled the matron, glancing down at the diminutive creature before her.

"I did help! I can sew!" cried Jerusha, trembling with anger and weakness; "mamma taught me, and says I sew well for a child. See, here is my thimble," and she took it from her pocket and placed it upon her thin finger.

"Yes, for a child; we do not expect much from a girl of ten. Let me see your clothes."

This request brought a gratified smile to the grave lips of the little girl; she untied the package with deft fingers and took from it a pink cashmere gown, soft and fine in texture, made in the latest style and with artistic skill.

"Who gave you this lovely dress, child?"

"Mamma, I told you. We made it out of one

she wore at boarding-school, and this, and this," and she took up one of dark blue cashmere, and one of crimson, both of the finest grade.

"But, child, these beautiful dresses will be of no use here."

"They *will* be of use," cried Jerusha excitedly. "I heard mamma say that if my grandfather would take me to his home I would wear pretty clothes like these every day."

"But you are not at your grandfather's; you are in an orphan asylum, and must wear that uniform."

"What is an asylum, and what is a uniform?" was asked wonderingly.

"Come to the school-room and I will show you," and leading the way, she opened the door into a large room where a number of children were studying their lessons for the next day.

"Now you see the way the girls dress here, and you will dress the same if you stay."

"But I will not dress that way, and I will wear my pretty dresses or I will not stay."

"We will see first whether you can stay," com-

mented the matron coldly. "In the meantime you will remain in this room and listen to the children during the half hour they study, then you can go with them to the playground," and she signalled to one of the teachers to give the newcomer a place.

That place was beside Diana Strong, an orphan a few years older than Jerusha, and tall for her age. She had flaxen hair, pale blue eyes, a sallow complexion and a long upper lip, which, however, did not conceal the large front teeth. But withal, there was an expression in her plain face of such genuine kindness and sympathy for everybody and everything that all felt comfortable in her presence.

The matron had in the meantime returned to the reception-room and conducted Horace to the boys' department of the institution where, in a short time, he was as much at home as if he had known no other.

Investigations made the next day by the managers gave, after strict research, confirmation that Jerusha Flint and her brother were really objects

of charity. The mother had died a few days after the little family of four had taken possession of a miserable home, the children had been taken away by someone, and the place was tenantless. That was all the neighbors knew of the matter, so nothing was left to do, even if otherwise desired, but to keep them in the asylum.

A few evenings after this conclusion was reached, the matron, in her quiet, comfortable room, was about to enjoy her evening meal after the labors of the day.

The children of all ages and sizes were in their white-robed beds after their simple supper of bread and milk, and were sleeping perhaps more sweetly than if in more luxurious homes.

A tap upon the door was followed by the entrance of an old friend, a trained nurse from one of the city hospitals, who was cordially invited to break bread with the hostess.

"I will," she assented, "but first I must tell you of this," and she took from its wrappings an ebony box of curious workmanship, inlaid with pearl, beautiful in design and finish.

"Where did you get it?" asked the matron, taking it in her hand.

"It was put in my care by a patient at the hospital who said he had brought a girl here named Jerusha Flint, and her brother Horace. He asked me to bring it to you to keep safely and give it to Jerusha when she is sixteen. He said she had often been shown by her mother how to open it, and would remember how it is done; you see it has no key."

"Did he say that he is the father of these children?"

"No. I have told you all that he said; for he became delirious, and although he talked to himself in a low tone or a whisper, there was nothing connected enough to let us know who he is. All I can say is that with his blonde hair, deep blue eyes and tinge of color in his face, now that he has fever, he is as handsome as a picture."

"I wonder how long he will remain in the hospital?"

"Until he is carried out, if I am not greatly mistaken. He has brain fever, his system is completely

run down and the doctors say that he has suffered a severe nervous shock. There is no hope whatever of his recovery."

"Has he no friends, I wonder?"

"No one has called to see him. The doctor found a letter in his pocket, addressed and sealed, but not stamped. He asked me to write to the gentleman whose name and address was upon it, and inform him that a man who had taken two children named Flint to an orphan asylum was lying at the hospital dangerously ill. I did so, enclosing the letter, but there was no reply to either."

"In his delirious talk does he say nothing of his past life?"

"Yes, he rambles on about an elopement, and of disobedience to parents, and of the regret and misery which was its punishment, and of his bringing someone to poverty, and of a long, weary walk, and of a terrible fright, and of a key, which is, I suppose the one we found in his pocket; but he whispers most of the time, and we cannot understand him."

The matron unlocked a drawer in her desk,

placed the box within, locked it, and then the two sat down to the tea, toast and other edibles which the maid placed upon the table.

"Do these Flint children fret much for their parents?" asked the guest, as she sipped her tea.

"The boy is a cheery little soul, and has never shed a tear; and I do not believe that the girl grieves for them, although she has long spells of crying in some corner away from the other children. Once Diana Strong put her arm around her and asked why she wept, and received a slap in the face, and an angry request to attend to her own affairs."

"Is Diana the girl who is intending to be a trained nurse?"

"Yes, and if ever one was born to that calling Diana is that one. She is gentle, patient, quiet, watchful, can do with little sleep and is never happier than when in the sick-room of the asylum waiting upon someone that is ailing."

"When will she begin her training?"

"When she is fourteen. As you know, the children here do nearly all the work of the institution, and in this way, beside getting a good common edu-

cation, they learn housework, cooking and sewing. If the girls and boys show aptitude for any special trade or occupation, they can leave the asylum at the age of fourteen to learn it; the boys returning here as their home until they are eighteen, and the girls until they are twenty. That little Jerusha will, I am sure, wish to learn dressmaking."

"Is she fond of sewing?"

"Yes, and I never saw a child so adept with the needle. The sewing teacher says she is a wonder. She is fond of dress and has several beautiful gowns which she says were made over for her by her mother. Why she made three for a growing girl is more than I can understand; it was a waste of beautiful material; one at a time would have been sufficient. They fit her to perfection; but the clothes of the boy, while beautifully made, are ill-fitting and of coarse material."

"Was Jerusha willing to wear the uniform?"

"No; she refused to put it on and acted so about it that she was not allowed to go out with the other children upon their daily walk. Moreover, some of the older ones have told her that only poor chil-

dren are here and she is ashamed of being with them, but I earnestly hope she will outgrow the feeling."

In this she was mistaken. Jerusha did not outgrow it; instead, the thought grew more intolerable with every passing year. She shrank from the sight of visitors, and refused to act as guide through the great building, a duty which most of the orphans considered a privilege and pleasure.

She formed an attachment for no one under the roof, and saw Diana Strong depart for three years' training in the hospital without one word or sign of regret—Diana who had always stood her friend, when through her violent temper and insubordination she was in difficulty with the matron or her assistants.

Jerusha had inherited the haughty, imperious disposition of her mother, her mother's father, and her mother's grandfather, who, owing to an ebullition of temper, was forced to flee from his native country and seek refuge in America.

She, like her maternal ancestors, was impetuous and irritable, resentful and unforgiving; therefore

it was a foregone conclusion that in her journey through the world she would be held aloof by those who might have been her friends, and her coldness, want of affection and above all, her pride, kept her aloof from those with whom she was compelled to mingle. "Love thy neighbor as thyself," was a creed which she did not assimilate.

Horace was as different as if of another race. He had inherited the easy-going nature of his father, who had been the petted and only son in a luxurious home. Therefore the asylum and everything connected with it was, in his opinion, all that was required to keep one happy and contented.

He considered it so superior to the home they had left that he wondered at Jerusha's dissatisfaction, while she in turn was angry at his want of pride and ambition. The large playground in fair weather and the basement playroom when it stormed were the dearest spots on earth to him. He had plenty of playfellows, something never before enjoyed, for his mother refused emphatically to allow him to play with any children in the poor neighborhoods where they were compelled to live;

all he knew of them was what he could see from a window.

Years passed, and Jerusha looked forward with impatience to the time when she could be self-supporting and thus leave the asylum, and on the day that she was fourteen she engaged herself as apprentice to a fashionable modiste.

Her employer was more than pleased with her skill, for even at that early age she could be trusted to work without oversight, and resented any that was not strictly necessary.

She was glad when Horace was at last old enough to leave the asylum to learn the trade of carpenter and locksmith, and they never met during his apprenticeship that she did not urge him to be diligent in learning all that was possible that he, too, might be self-supporting and they could have a home together.

There were two subjects which all who were acquainted with Jerusha found it wise not to touch upon if not wishing to have a scathing retort from her satirical tongue.

One of these subjects was her early home and

parentage, and the other the asylum which had fostered her helpless childhood, the home of which she grew more and more ashamed as time passed on. She never spoke of it of her own free will, and dreaded Saturday evening when she must go there to remain until Monday morning.

It was during one of these visits that her sixteenth birthday dawned, and the matron gave her the little ebony work-box.

Jerusha received it without betraying the least surprise and restrained her impatience to open it until she could be alone, and the matron was never rewarded for her care of it by being told what it contained. She did see, however, in the increased haughtiness and arrogance of Jerusha the influence exercised by its contents and wondered again and again what it held, which induced her to keep herself more than ever aloof from her and from every inmate of the asylum.

To Jerusha's deep chagrin the ebony box held no money or valuables as she had hoped and expected from the moment it was put in her hands. It held neither more nor less than three letters, one of

them written by Mrs. Flint to her father, and returned to her enclosed in his reply. The third letter was addressed to Jerusha, and was written by Mrs. Flint, telling her "poor, motherless little daughter, Jerusha," of her ancestry on both sides of the house.

In this letter Jerusha was instructed to forward the other two letters to her grandfather at the address given, providing the time ever came that she desired to do so.

Dating from the perusal of these epistles, Jerusha refused to remain with the dressmaker, but making of necessity a home of the asylum, she commenced business for herself, finding no difficulty in obtaining patrons, some of them being the best customers of her former employer.

These ladies, appreciating her skill, solicited her oversight of their toilets, and she went from one aristocratic home to another, where her word was law in regard to costumes.

Being recommended by these patrons to suburban friends, she drifted to the village of Dorton, a few miles out of Baltimore.

Thus while her city employers were at the seashore and the mountains, Jerusha was summering with four families in that picturesque part of Maryland, plying her art with untiring fidelity.

Her favorite place of the four was "My Lady's Manor," the handsome villa of Mrs. Farnsworth, widow of Joshua Farnsworth. The next best was "Friedenheim," the country-seat of the Courtneys; then in order came "Fair Meadow," the fine farm of the Merryman family, and lastly the colonial mansion of Dr. Lattinger, in the village of Dorton.

Jerusha was industrious, capable, prompt and energetic, but she was lacking in enthusiasm in regard to her art. Many persons with but half her ability had become originators of designs for costumes, and in time owned large establishments which gave employment to many helpers.

Jerusha craved no prominence in that line. It was only the force of necessity that made her willing to be self-supporting through the only work she could do well. She was too impatient and irritable to teach her craft to others. She could not direct, nor could she endure to have about her, help-

ers for whose mistakes she would be responsible. She had felt herself alone all her life and expected to remain so.

During these years Diana Strong had finished her training as a professional nurse and was recommended by the hospital physicians as one of the best.

More than once she had charge of an invalid in a wealthy home where Jerusha happened to be employed; they took their meals at the same table, but the subject of former acquaintance was a tabooed theme with Jerusha, and Diana was too amiable to go counter to her wishes.

Every season that Jerusha went to Dorton she grew more anxious to abide there, and her gaze rested frequently upon a deserted brown frame dwelling of four rooms about a mile out of the village. It had not been tenanted for years, and was fast going to decay, but Jerusha saw that a few dollars spent upon it would convert it into a home, and a home was the greatest longing of her heart.

She mentioned the subject to Horace several

times during his apprenticeship, but he evinced no enthusiasm upon the subject. He was well satisfied with Baltimore and his asylum acquaintances there, and saw no need of change.

But, as was the rule where Jerusha was concerned, she had her way, and after Horace was free to go and she had secured employment for him through her patrons at Dorton, they took up their residence in the little brown house.

Jerusha had bargained that they should have it rent free for three years providing they made all necessary repairs. To this the owner agreed, and also to allow them for a nominal rent the large plot of ground back of it for a garden. At all leisure times the saw and hammer of Horace could be heard, paint and lime were not spared, and flowers sprang up at the touch of Jerusha, who at last had a home of her own.

The short distance from it to the railway station, and the few miles of car ride to the city enabled them to have employment at both ends of the line, and if there was ever a moment in Jerusha's life when she could consider herself contented, it was

when after each day's absence she came in sight of the brown dwelling.

Seasons had come and gone, and Jerusha, who never before had known attachment to person or place, was one evening sitting with Horace on the moon-lighted porch, after a busy day in the city. She was discussing further improvements, the only subject which was of interest to both, but to which Horace that evening lent but an absent-minded attention.

"Jerusha," he said, as he arose to retire, "I am to be married to-morrow to one who was in the orphan asylum with us. Her name, as you will remember, is now Jennie Strong, and she is the widow of Diana Strong's brother. I shall bring her here."

He closed the door and Jerusha was alone with her astonishment and her anger.

CHAPTER II

HILDA'S AUNT ASHLEY

Miss Jerusha Flint was not the only one who appreciated the home of Dr. and Mrs. Lattinger, in Dorton. Not only the villagers, but people of the surrounding neighborhood had a warm feeling for the genial and hospitable residents of the old colonial mansion, which had been for generations in the family of Mrs. Lattinger, and where she had lived all her life. The Lattingers had also frequent visitors from Baltimore, where the doctor had spent the early years of his practice, some of them being former patients who came out for the day for change of air and scene.

One pleasant morning in June, Dr. Lattinger had the unexpected pleasure of a visit from a former college chum, a lawyer who had a short time before bought one of the pretty suburban homes, and, as was the doctor's custom, he took him upon his round among his patients.

"Yes, doctor," commented the visitor, when about noon they were returning to the village, on the same drive upon which they had set out, but in an opposite direction, "you are correct in your opinion of this region of country; it is prosperous and beautiful. There are so many picturesque spots. For instance that cottage nearly covered with ivy, which we are about to pass, is a picture in itself."

"Yes, it is the home of an artist, Norman Ashley, who, with his wife, came here from Baltimore that he might have natural scenery for his pictures. They are handsome young people and live an ideal life."

"That lovely little girl amid the roses on the lawn is, I suppose, their daughter."

"No, she is Hilda Brinsfield, the orphan niece of Mr. Ashley."

"Hilda Brinsfield!" echoed the gentleman in surprise. "My wife and I were wondering only yesterday what became of that sweet child after the death of her lovely young mother."

"Then you are acquainted with her parents?" said Dr. Lattinger with interest.

"Only for the little time I have lived in my present home. Her father, Rev. Freeman Brinsfield, was pastor of our village church, his first charge. I heard incidentally that his means had been exhausted in his college and theological course, and he was very grateful for the call. My friend also added that he came of a long line of ministers, one or more of them being pioneer missionaries. Little Hilda is a child of prayer and has the promise of being cared for."

"She certainly has a happy home with the Ashleys, who come as near idolizing her as Christian people will allow themselves to worship anything earthly. The three pass most of this beautiful June weather in the open, Mr. Ashley taking his artist equipments, Mrs. Ashley a book and a basket of luncheon, and Hilda her doll and toys, and in the shady woods or blossoming orchard they encamp."

"Truly an ideal life; and now tell me who lives in that handsome villa just above it, but on the opposite side of the road?"

"That is the residence of Miss Anna Ashburton, and is called 'My Lady's Manor,' for as you prob-

ably know, most country homes in 'Maryland, My Maryland' have names, generally pretty well adapted to their appearance. It was left to her by a widow—Mrs. Joshua Farnsworth—who died a few months ago. They were not the least related, but loved each other as mother and daughter."

"Had Mrs. Joshua Farnsworth no relatives to whom she could leave her property, or who would contend for it?"

"No, her only near relative—her sister—the widow of the late Judge Lacy, of Springfield, Ohio, is wealthy, has no children, and has no need of what Mrs. Farnsworth gave to her foster daughter."

"Miss Anna is elderly, I presume?"

"No, scarcely eighteen, is amiable and attractive, finely educated, a musician and artist; an orphan without a relative in the world, so far as is known."

"But she does not live alone in that great mansion?"

"Yes, with the exception of a middle-aged woman—Miss Jerusha Flint—who lived with her brother, Horace, and his family in the brown cottage we passed this morning, about a mile beyond the

other end of the village, and who was more than gratified when Miss Anna invited her to make her home at 'My Lady's Manor.' "

"They must live a lonely life there."

"Not at all. Miss Anna is much beloved, and has many visitors, not only from the neighborhood, but from Baltimore. Moreover, the servants, who have known and loved her from babyhood, have their comfortable quarters back of the mansion, and as Miss Anna's library and sleeping-room windows look directly down upon the doors of their cabins, Lois, Phebe and Judy are at all hours of the day and night within call."

"It is not likely that Miss Anna, being young and attractive, will remain long unmarried."

"If the opinion of the neighborhood be correct, she will in the near future bestow her hand and heart upon Mr. Valentine Courtney—the brother-in-law of our good pastor Rev. Carl Courtney, of 'Friedenheim,' the old homestead of the Courtneys. He is a lawyer, has his office in Baltimore, but makes his home at 'Friedenheim.' He is one of the most useful and liberal members of his brother-in-

law's church, and is in every respect an estimable young man."

"You say 'brother-in-law'—and yet the Rev. Carl is a Courtney."

"Yes, he is a distant relative of his wife, and of her brother, Valentine, and his home from childhood has been at 'Friedenheim,' which was inherited by Mrs. Courtney."

"That walk upon the roof of Miss Anna's villa must give a fine view of the surrounding country."

"Fine indeed, and it has a history, and a mystery. About twenty-five years ago, Mr. Joshua Farnsworth died there, it is believed, by an unknown hand."

"In what manner?" asked his visitor, full of interest.

"As I was informed by my wife and others of the residents of the neighborhood, Mr. Farnsworth, who was in his usual excellent health the evening of his death, had gone to the village postoffice, and while perusing a letter just received, a hand was laid upon his shoulder by a stranger, who said in a low tone, 'Joshua!'

"Mr. Farnsworth turned very pale, the two went out, and walked to 'My Lady's Manor,' talking earnestly. Later in the evening they were seen upon the roof, seated upon the bench that lines the iron-work balustrade, still engaged in earnest conversation, and a few hours after, the villagers were shocked to hear that Mr. Farnsworth was found there, dead, and the stranger gone, no one knew when nor where."

"But was there no investigation as to the cause of his death?"

"Yes, and the verdict at the inquest was death from heart failure; but those who witnessed the meeting at the postoffice, and the villagers who saw them on the walk upon the roof believe that the stranger took his life."

"And you say that no one knew how and when the stranger left the place?"

"No. Judge and Mrs. Lacy were visiting there at the time. They and Mrs. Farnsworth had retired, as had the servants, all the doors and windows were locked for the night and the shutters closed; and thus they were found when about midnight

search was made for Mr. Farnsworth. Not a footfall had been heard, or sound of any kind giving token of the departure of the stranger. It was, and has remained a mystery."

An elegant suburban home indeed was "My Lady's Manor"—a three-storied granite building, light gray in color, with sea-green cornice and shutters and partly screened by maple trees from the road leading to Dorton.

From the walk upon the roof could be had a charming view of woodlands, meadows, farmhouses, country-seats, mill properties, the creek that flowed past them, and villages; among them Dorton, with its one church spire.

In the distance Baltimore's monuments were clearly discernible, the harbor with its forest of masts, the Patapsco flecked with sails, Federal Hill and Fort McHenry; all uniting in a varied and attractive landscape.

Yes, "My Lady's Manor" was one of the choice places of the neighborhood, and Jerusha Flint felt it a pleasant change to be the respected companion of its young lady owner, and, having given up her

despised occupation, was blooming into youth and beauty in the sunlight of a happy home.

Among Anna's many acquaintances there was no one whose friendship she prized more than that of Mrs. Ashley. They were congenial in every way, save that Mrs. Ashley, though but a few months older, cared but little for society, where she would have been such an ornament with her fine presence, deep blue eyes, wealth of auburn hair and a complexion of matchless fairness. The company of her husband, Hilda and Anna was all she solicited, and had but a speaking acquaintance with the people of Dorton and its neighborhood, making no calls except to "My Lady's Manor" and "Friedenheim."

The Civil War was darkening the land, and Norman Ashley laid aside palette and brush to join in the struggle between the blue and the gray.

He was not willing to leave his wife and Hilda in the cottage without a caretaker, and as Providence willed it, Diana Strong was indulging in a respite from hospital work in the home of Mrs. Horace Flint and was willing to assume the light duty of housekeeper at the Ashley cottage.

Jerusha Flint was the negotiator in the affair, and as she generally carried to a successful issue whatever she undertook, Diana was duly installed and Mr. Ashley went to join his regiment with the comforting thought that his little family was in good hands.

This separation was a terrible trial to the young husband and wife, and Anna Ashburton was Mrs. Ashley's faithful friend and comforter. She had also great affection for Hilda and would have her for hours at a time at the villa, to the secret displeasure of Jerusha, who had no love for any child, much less for one connected in any way with Mrs. Ashley, looked upon by Miss Flint as proud, cold and self-sufficient.

Moreover, that grim tyrant, jealousy, had taken possession of Jerusha, assuring her that it was a blessed relief to the cultivated intellect of Anna Ashburton to exchange for a time her dull companionship for that of the cultured and accomplished Mrs. Ashley.

The first time that Anna made an engagement with Mrs. Ashley to gather wood flowers, she in-

vited Miss Flint to accompany them, but her courtesy was rewarded by a haughty refusal and a scornful flash of the black eyes.

Anna knew that this was not intended for her, but for the waiting Mrs. Ashley down at the cottage, who knew nothing of Jerusha's feeling in regard to her, nor did Anna think it kindness to enlighten her.

On her part, Jerusha considered that in view of the information contained in her mother's letter in the ebony box, she had a better right to be proud than had Mrs. Ashley, and therefore would not take a step out of her way to be in her company.

"Where did you first meet Mr. Ashley?" Anna asked one summer afternoon while they were arranging flowers under the shade of an oak tree, while Hilda, who always accompanied them, was busy gathering more.

"In a hail-storm in Ohio. Shall I tell you of it?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Anna gleefully, "the beginning being so romantic, it cannot fail in interest."

"Yes, a little romance and a great trial; for it

has partly estranged me from my sister and her husband—Dr. Cyril Warfield—with whom I made my home after the death of our parents.

"The estrangement is more my fault than theirs. I should not have treated them with coldness and reserve in return for their lightly expressed opposition to my marriage," and her beautiful eyes filled with tears.

"I should not have mentioned the subject; please do not continue it if it distresses you," pleaded Anna, her eyes filling in sympathy.

"I am glad you mentioned it. I have wished to tell you of myself, but never felt sufficiently acquainted until this summer, and you cannot realize what your companionship has been to me since my husband left for the battlefield.

"While our parents lived, they, with their three children—Sarah, Herbert and I—resided in our old homestead in Ohio, near the village of Woodmont, a few miles from Springfield.

"Papa had intrusted the property for his children to the hands of friends in whom he had confidence; but through their failure we lost heavily, and when

the estate was closed there was but a remnant left of what he intended for us.

"When Sarah, who is ten years older than I, married Cyril, she went with him to the Warfield homestead which adjoined our place, and there they have lived happily. But Cyril is in feeble health and Sarah is very anxious, fearing he will never be better.

"Herbert, with his share, bought the store of a merchant in Woodmont and Sarah and Cyril took me to their home where I was treated as tenderly as are their two boys, Paul and Fred.

"One afternoon in June I had driven to the village postoffice and was returning as quickly as possible, for the appearance of the clouds betokened a storm. I had passed a turn in the road when rain came down in torrents, then hail fell fast, the wind blowing it in my face, stunning and nearly blinding me.

"The terrified pony ran. Then as the hail storm increased in violence, she crouched down and I was about to spring from the carriage when a hand restrained me.

"'You are safer there,' said Mr. Ashley, for it was he who spread the carriage robe over the pony and encouraged her to rise; then he stepped into the carriage, took the lines from my trembling hands, and, turning about, drove to the shelter of a large tree. It was all the work of a moment, and he had scarcely glanced at me until I spoke, thanking him for his assistance.

"'The storm will soon be over,' he remarked in response. 'Will you allow me to see you safely home? My name is Norman Ashley and my home is in a village near Baltimore with my widowed sister, Mrs. Brinsfield. I am an artist and, with several of my fellow-artists, am traveling upon a sketching tour. They have gone further west, I remaining in Woodmont, having found some picturesque views for sketching and putting later upon canvas.'

"'I do not wish to keep you so long in damp clothing,' I said.

"'Oh, we tramps do not mind such trifles,' he replied lightly, and as soon as the hail ceased falling we sped home.

"My sister and brother-in-law had been terribly anxious and were rejoiced to see me unhurt. They welcomed Mr. Ashley cordially, invited him to dine with us the following day, and then Cyril's farmer, Ben Duvall, took him in the phaeton to Woodmont."

"He came next day, I am sure," smiled Anna.

"Yes, and the next and the next; and Dr. Warfield and every member of the family enjoyed his genial society. He brought his sketch book, and every day that Cyril had leisure he took him to the prettiest spots in the neighborhood, and at other times Paul, Fred and I accompanied him in woodland rambles and watched in surprise the quickness and accuracy with which the scenes were sketched.

"His companions returned from their tour and his stay in Woodmont was ended; and the morning he called to say good-bye he presented sister Sarah with a fine oil painting from one of the sketches she had admired.

"He asked to correspond with me and letters passed between us for more than a year. Through the meeting in Springfield of a former classmate, a

resident of Baltimore, Cyril learned that Mr. Ashley was a consistent church member, a Sabbath school teacher and in every way an estimable young man. Therefore the only objection that he and sister Sarah made to our marriage lay in what Mr. Ashley had considered it his duty to tell them, and me, that his only means of maintenance was in the sale of his paintings, and they feared that it was an uncertain dependence.

"The following autumn we were married and he brought me to his sister's home near Baltimore. She was the widow of a young minister and the mother of our loved Hilda. She was in frail health, but lingered until spring, and oh, Anna, during that winter I learned how a Christian can meet death. She had not reached her twenty-fifth year and her callers from the city were principally her former classmates, her church, Sabbath school, music and art associates, and not one, I am sure, visited her without being impressed and benefited by the sweet serenity of her manner and the almost angelic expression upon her lovely features. She was an embodiment of gratitude to God who had answered

her prayers, that her life might be spared until her brother married, and that his wife would be one who would be willing to take her only child, her beloved Hilda, and one to whom she would intrust her. She blessed me with tears of joy that I proved to be that one. She gave Hilda to me and I accepted the charge, promising to do the same by her that I would were she my own child.

"One sweet morning in May she was called to come up higher, and a week or so later we left the city and came to the cottage."

"Thank you for telling me of yourself and those near to you," said Anna. "I feel that you and Hilda are dearer to me than ever, and I have interest in your sister, Mrs. Warfield, and her family. Does she resemble you?"

"Yes, the description of one would answer for both so far as appearance is concerned, but Sarah is more practical than I; a noble, energetic, useful woman; one to depend upon in every circumstance in life and at the same time a loving wife, mother and sister."

"There comes Mr. Merryman's errand boy, Per-

ry," said Anna, as the boy came whistling across the field on his way to "Fair Meadow" from Dorton. "He has a letter; perhaps it is for one of us, as he has come a little out of his way," and both arose as he came near.

"The postmaster gave me a letter for you, Mrs. Ashley," he said. "It has a black border and he thought it might be one that you should have as quickly as possible. I called at your house but you were not in and I left it with Miss Diana Strong. Was that right?"

"Perfectly right, Perry, and I thank you for your kindness," and the boy passed on with the mail for the "Fair Meadow" home, whistling and halting occasionally to pluck a flower.

"Oh, Anna," said Mrs. Ashley anxiously, "I am afraid that letter brings sad news of Dr. Warfield. Will you stop with me and see?"

"Willingly; and I sincerely hope that your fears will not be realized."

The two ladies, followed by Hilda, hurried through the meadow and up the road to the cottage, where Anna listened to the reading of the missive

which gave the intelligence that Mrs. Warfield was a widow and Paul and Fred fatherless.

Mrs. Ashley's tears fell fast in sympathy for her sister's bereavement, and Anna wept with her and stayed for a time to give what comfort was in her power.

"I will write to Sarah this evening," said Mrs. Ashley, when Anna arose to go home; "I wish I had written oftener and less reservedly while Cyril lived. He was always kind to me and never knew how much I appreciated his goodness. Oh, Anna, will we never learn to be tender and considerate with our fellow pilgrims? We never appreciate them as we should until they are gone; or if we do we never let them know it."

CHAPTER III

"MY LADY'S MANOR" AND ITS MYSTERY

During that one beautiful summer Anna Ashburton remained in her childhood's home and scarcely a day passed that she and Mrs. Ashley did not see each other or have an exchange of messages.

But one morning a lawyer from Baltimore visited "My Lady's Manor" on behalf of a client in California—Mr. Reginald Farnsworth—who could prove beyond doubt that he was the legal owner of the property, being the only son and heir of Joshua Farnsworth by a former marriage.

In vain Anna protested that she had never heard of a former marriage; in vain the Courtneys, the Merrymans, the Lattingers and other families who had known the Farnsworths and whom Anna summoned to her assistance, affirmed the same. The lawyer produced a marriage certificate and letters, which even their unwilling eyes could see were

genuine. The signatures—"Joshua Farnsworth," were fac-similes of those in the foster father's letters to her foster mother, kept by Anna with rev erent care.

To add to the proof already given, he brought with him an old San Francisco newspaper in which was a notice of the death of the wife of Joshua Farnsworth, of that city, aged twenty-one years, leaving an infant son, Reginald.

The conference ended for the time by the lawyer giving Anna a letter from his client in which he explained his reason for the delay in putting in his claim for the property. He wrote that he was but an infant when his father, Joshua Farnsworth, left San Francisco; and it was not until he was almost grown to manhood that he became anxious to know if he was yet among the living. He had made all inquiry and had advertised, but could gain no information, and for years had given up the search. But recently he had obtained the certain information that his father had been the owner of "My Lady's Manor," and he, Reginald Farnsworth, being the only child and heir, now claimed it according to

law, his stepmother having only a life estate in it, not having the right to give it to anyone.

He added that his wife had long wished to be nearer her mother, who resided in Philadelphia. Now the way was opened, and he requested Miss Ashburton to vacate the premises as early as convenient.

"How did he learn all this?" asked Anna, as she finished the letter.

"From me, and I obtained it incidentally from a lawyer associate who had never heard me speak of Mr. Farnsworth, therefore was unaware of my knowing anyone of that name. He had visited a physician of your village and was told the incidents connected with this place. I wrote immediately to Mr. Reginald Farnsworth and he in turn put the case in my hands. I searched the land records of Maryland and found that Joshua Farnsworth, of San Francisco, had purchased a tract known as 'My Lady's Manor,' the date corresponding exactly with the year of his leaving California."

Anna Ashburton possessed a sense of honor above wishing to retain what belonged to another, and

with bitter tears left "My Lady's Manor" to go to Mrs. Lacy in Springfield, and Jerusha returned to the brown cottage and her occupation, and if she grieved over the change her proud nature gave no sign.

Mr. Reginald Farnsworth, apparently unconcerned as to Anna's future, took possession of "My Lady's Manor" with its spacious grounds, woodland, meadows and orchards, having three experienced men to cultivate it and three as efficient house servants as could have been found in Maryland.

But his conscience troubled him. He had allowed greed to influence him in depriving the defenceless girl of the home which had been given her in the belief that there was no other heir, and he had not the excuse of straitened circumstances to warrant the action.

One evening he had been directing the cutting down of several fine maples which obstructed a favorite view. They had been planted by his father to shade a spring of clear, cool water, and, being prized by her foster mother, were dear to Anna.

Feeling very weary after his walk, he went to

the library, and throwing himself upon a lounge, fell asleep. When he awoke the moon was shining brightly through the large windows, making every object visible.

The voices of his wife and Mrs. Lattinger were heard from the parlor, and had almost lulled him again to slumber when he was conscious of a presence in the room. Without stirring, he opened his eyes, and passing him almost within touch was an apparently old lady, a stranger to him.

She was short in stature and slender, her pale face shaded by gray curls, and upon her bowed head was a lace cap with long tabs of the same costly material. Her dress was of soft black silken goods, and a white kerchief, overlaid by one of black, was crossed upon her breast.

Mr. Farnsworth's first thought was that a caller had come to the library for a book, but seeing him sleeping was returning quietly without it. He was therefore more than surprised to see her, after gliding through the door, ascend swiftly the steps leading to the attic.

He arose and followed, keeping her in view until

she reached a distant corner of the unfurnished back room at the end of the dwelling, when, like a shadow-picture, she disappeared.

Feeling bewildered, Mr. Farnsworth descended to his bed-room adjoining the library, bathed face and hands in cold water, arranged his attire, and then sat down to reflect.

He was not superstitious, but he feared that his conscience-stricken feelings had influenced his brain and he had imagined what was not there to see. Believing this, he joined the ladies in the parlor.

"You are not well, Reginald," said his wife anxiously, "you are looking very pale; I am afraid the sun was too hot for you."

"My husband has had several cases of prostration from heat in the last few days," remarked Mrs. Lattinger, "and one of the men came near losing his life from exposure to the sun."

"How was he affected?" asked Mr. Farnsworth.

"He was at first unconscious, then delirious, imagining he saw weird, spectral objects, causing him fright and anxiety."

Mr. Farnsworth breathed more freely upon hear-

ing this. It was not a figment of the brain caused by an uneasy conscience as he had feared, but he had suffered a slight sunstroke, and, believing this, he became more tranquil.

Resolving not to expose himself to the heat of the sun more than necessary, he decided not to mention what he had seen to his wife, who was nervous, nor to the servants, who were superstitious.

The figure he had seen corresponded in every detail with the description of the late Mrs. Farnsworth, as given that evening to his wife by Mrs. Lattinger, and as it was the last thing he heard before dropping asleep it was not surprising that in his drowsy condition he should imagine he saw her.

"Lois," he said one evening, halting at the door of her cabin, "when is the best time to plant Lima beans?"

"When de sign is in de arms, 'kase you wants de vines to run up de poles and not bunch on de ground," she answered promptly.

"I mean the time in the month, Lois. I have no belief in signs."

"Culled folks is allus mighty keerful about de

signs, and de keerfulest ones has de best gardens."

"What is the best time for beets and parsnips?" continued Mr. Farnsworth, who, having always lived in San Francisco, where he was a banker, had but little knowledge of horticulture.

"When de sign is in de feet, kase you don't want 'em to spindle up and be all top, but go down in de ground and grow."

"Have we cucumber seed, Lois?"

"Lots of 'em; ol' misses allus let de fust big uns ripen for seed. Dey is in de attic, hangin' on de rafters in de back room. Does yer want me to fotch 'em down?"

"No, the ground is not ready. I will go up this evening and look over all the seeds."

After tea Mr. Farnsworth ascended to the attic and stood at one of the front windows gazing out over the beautiful neighborhood, the village of Dorton and the distant city. He then went into the back room where the seeds hung, each kind in its little sack, tied and labeled by a careful hand.

The light being insufficient, he took the sacks into the front room, made his selections and had

turned to put the remaining ones back upon their hooks when in the door-way through which he must pass stood the little old lady in the costume in which he had first seen her. A tremor seized Mr. Farnsworth, his heart throbbed, and his hands trembled so much that the sacks dropped to the floor. He stooped to recover them and when he arose the figure had disappeared.

All was silent, the attic and stair-way could be surveyed at a glance; there was not a living thing to be seen.

Taking all the seeds with him, he went to the garden, gave them to the men, and returned to the parlor where were his wife and two callers, Mrs. Courtney and Mrs. Merryman, whom he welcomed and then took a seat upon a sofa in a distant corner of the spacious parlor.

"I have been overseeing my gardening," he remarked languidly; "I think there is nothing more interesting."

"Yes, for those who understand it," smiled Mrs. Courtney. "Brother Valentine oversees our garden and I know but little about the work of cultivating

the different vegetables. I never tried planting anything except turnip seeds, and that was not a success. The rule given me by a facetious friend was to start out with half the quantity I considered sufficient, to fall down and spill half, then sow half of what remained; but with all these precautions the turnips were so crowded that they were not much larger than walnuts and it did not occur to me to weed some of them out and give the others a chance."

This incident recalled others to the ladies and Mr. Farnsworth was silent, pondering over the event of his day.

The summer passed and one evening in early autumn Mrs. Farnsworth accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Merryman to a concert in the city. It being an hour's drive, they were not expected back until near midnight, and after reading until weary, Mr. Farnsworth turned the lamp flame low and lay down upon the lounge in the library.

The house was still and he slept, but was awakened by what appeared an ice-cold hand upon his forehead. Startled, he sprang to his feet. The

little old lady, her hand raised in warning, glided through the door and up the stair-way.

A cold moisture stood upon the forehead of Mr. Farnsworth. He trembled and grew faint, and it was with an intense sense of relief that he heard Mr. Merryman's carriage stop at the gate.

He hurried out to receive his wife and helped her to alight. The four passed a few minutes in pleasant conversation; Mr. and Mrs. Farnsworth thanked their neighbors for their courtesy and kindness, then the Merrymans proceeded on their short way down the road and up their maple-lined lane to "Fair Meadow."

Mr. and Mrs. Farnsworth went to the parlor where, in listening to an animated account of the concert, Mr. Farnsworth's spirits revived, but his sleep that night was disturbed and he arose unrefreshed.

"Mrs. Lattinger's little girls are coming to take tea this evening," remarked Mrs. Farnsworth cheerily at breakfast a few mornings after, "and I gave them permission to invite any playmates they wish to accompany them."

"That is all right," replied her husband languidly. "I have thought of several ways to entertain them, among them to dress in my great-grandmother's wedding costume."

The children came, the orchard was visited, the dove-cotes, the fish pond and garden had a share of their afternoon, then all returned to the parlor and Mrs. Farnsworth quietly slipped away to the attic.

She had taken the ancient attire from the trunk when she felt a presence near her, and turning, she saw slowly receding toward the back room a pale little lady with black gown, white kerchief and dainty lace cap.

Uttering a piercing scream, Mrs. Farnsworth fell to the floor in a swoon.

Children and servants flocked upstairs. One ran for Mr. Farnsworth who, pale as the unconscious woman at his feet, raised her in his arms and carried her down to the library and placed her upon the lounge.

One of the men-servants was sent to Dorton for Dr. Lattinger, while the frightened Lois, Phebe

and Judy used the simple restoratives at command to revive her.

"Mrs. Farnsworth has suffered a severe shock to her nerves," said the doctor as she showed signs of consciousness. "Has she been frightened?"

"I think so, but no one saw her when she fainted."

"Let all leave the room except the doctor and yourself, Reginald," said the lady tremulously. "I wish to tell you something."

Children and servants were sent below and with convulsive sobs Mrs. Farnsworth told what she had seen to the incredulous doctor and the believing husband.

"I will not remain here another day," she continued, "I would go this very evening if I could! Do not let us stay in this dreadful house, dear husband; let us go to my mother in Philadelphia."

To her infinite relief, Mr. Farnsworth did not chide or attempt to reason her out of her wish. Instead, he assured her that they would go on the early train the next morning.

"Do not leave me, Reginald!" she cried excitedly

as Mr. Farnsworth was about to follow the doctor from the room. "I cannot stay a moment alone."

"No, dear, I will not go from the door; I am only waiting for the soothing drops the doctor is preparing."

"What do you think the vision was, doctor?" he continued in a low tone.

"Only an optical illusion, caused, perhaps, by stooping over the trunk. But she must have change; take her to her mother as you promised."

The next morning husband and wife were on their way to Philadelphia, taking nothing but a few household treasures prized by Mrs. Farnsworth, and "My Lady's Manor," handsomely furnished, was placed for lease or rent in the hands of an agent.

His advertisements spoke in glowing terms of the place, and applications were numerous. The most eligible of these was accepted and a family who had never lived in the country took possession, delighted with "My Lady's Manor" and everything connected with it.

In two weeks they were back in the city, declaring they would not take the place as a gift and be

compelled to live there; the little old lady had paid them two visits and they would not wait for a third.

"My Lady's Manor" was again upon the market at reduced rent, and again a Baltimore family became its occupants, but remained less than a week.

Mr. Reginald Farnsworth who, with his wife, had returned to San Francisco, notified his agent to make no further effort to rent the dwelling, but to close it and put the keys in the care of the servants, who were asked to remain in the quarters.

"My Lady's Manor" had now furnished the neighborhood with four items of discussion: "What caused the death of Joshua Farnsworth?" "Who was the stranger?" "How did he escape from the roof?" "Why did the spectre represent Mrs. Farnsworth instead of her husband?"

These questions could not be answered, and the superstitious ones of the community avoided the place after nightfall and in their vocabulary it was spoken of as "the haunted house."

CHAPTER IV

A VISIT TO FRIEDENHEIM

Anna Ashburton's parting with her Dorton friends, especially Mrs. Ashley, was a trial to her, but their sympathy cheered and strengthened, and in comparatively good spirits she set out for Springfield.

She felt self-condemned that she had been reluctant to accept Mrs. Lacy's offer of a home when she saw the genuine pleasure with which she was welcomed by the sister of her foster mother.

The young people of Mrs. Lacy's large circle of friends rejoiced that an amiable, attractive girl was added to their list, and the festivities at the Lacy mansion were a delight to all.

Mr. Valentine Courtney, Mrs. Ashley and other intimate friends wrote to her in response to her letters, telling of her safe arrival and cordial reception, and congratulated her heartily upon having

another mother in Mrs. Lacy and pleasant companionship in the young people of Springfield.

They kept her apprised of all the happenings in Dorton and its neighborhood, told her of the grief of Lois, Phebe and Judy who could not speak without tears of the absence of their young mistress, but of the spectre that had frightened the superstitious from "My Lady's Manor" they made no mention.

Had the apparition taken any other form than that of Mrs. Joshua Farnsworth, they might have mentioned it in a spirit of jesting; as it was, no one in Dorton would thus wound her.

She was aware that Mr. Reginald Farnsworth had remained but a few months at "My Lady's Manor," but had heard that his wife insisted upon going to Philadelphia, and from thence to California, her widowed mother accompanying her.

That "My Lady's Manor" was unoccupied she attributed to a rich man's indifference. That the servants remained in their quarters was no surprise to her, well knowing that Mr. Farnsworth could find no better care-takers.

It was therefore a great surprise to her when one

day the Baltimore lawyer called to inform her that Mr. and Mrs. Farnsworth asked her as a favor to them to accept "My Lady's Manor" as a gift.

It was not until she read their letter in which they besought her pardon for the injustice done her, that she realized that the dear home of her childhood was restored to her, and with happy tears she thanked the one who brought the good news to her.

Visits had been frequent between Anna and Mrs. Warfield during the winter and early spring, Mrs. Ashley being the tie that bound them in close friendship, and Anna lost no time in going to the farmhouse to impart the information that "My Lady's Manor" was again in her possession; and before she left, it was decided that they would go to Dorton the following week as a surprise to their Maryland friends.

Mrs. Warfield was as eager for this visit as was Anna; for Norman Ashley had fallen in battle, and she hoped to bring her sister and Hilda Brinsfield to make their home with her in the farmhouse.

Mrs. Lacy had never admired Anna more than upon the morning she and Mrs. Warfield set out for

Maryland. The light of happiness beamed in her brilliant eyes, for she was returning to her childhood's home, doubly prized because once lost and mourned.

Mr. Valentine Courtney was on a business trip to Europe, but she would visit his sister at "Friedenheim," see the places where he had been, would again be with her loved Mrs. Ashley and Hilda, see again the Lattingers and the Merrymans, sit again in Dorton church, and walk again on the banks of the clear flowing stream, the favorite walk of the villagers.

Mrs. Warfield had reached the station at Springfield and was waiting her arrival. Soon the Lacy carriage drew up to the spot where she stood, the footman opened the door, and Anna stepped out as radiant as a May morning.

Together they entered the car, the whistle sounded, they were on their way, and had nearly reached the next halting place when there was a collision, then wails of mortal pain and Mrs. Warfield knew no more.

When consciousness returned she found herself

in the waiting-room of the depot, and near her lay Anna Ashburton, dying, but rational, and dictating to an attorney her wishes in regard to the disposal of her property, Mrs. Warfield and others witnessing her signature to the document written by him.

"My Lady's Manor" was bequeathed to her intended husband, Valentine Courtney, and the will was given in charge of Mrs. Warfield to deliver to Mrs. Lacy.

A few hours after the bright young life was ended and Mrs. Warfield accompanied all that remained of the lovely Anna Ashburton to the sorrow-stricken home in Springfield.

Mr. Valentine Courtney was on the eve of returning from London when Mrs. Lacy's cablegram apprizing him of the accident reached him and as soon as he landed in America he went to her home. From her he learned the details of the calamity; of the will which had made him owner of "My Lady's Manor," and of the illness of Mrs. Warfield; and so far as Mrs. Lacy knew, no word of these things had reached Dorton.

She was correct in this; no one there knew of the

intended visit of Anna Ashburton, and it was left to Mr. Courtney to take the sad news to "Friedenheim."

Only to the Rev. Carl and Mrs. Courtney did he impart the information that "My Lady's Manor" had been restored to Anna Ashburton, and she had bequeathed it to him.

His reticence was not owing to any wish to keep it a secret, but the subject was painful to him; it concerned no one but himself, and even in the home circle was seldom mentioned. Beyond it, no one in the neighborhood knew that Reginald Farnsworth was not the owner of the property.

The place had lost all interest to Valentine Courtney; the sight of it brought sad remembrance, and for that reason he took up his residence in Baltimore, making occasionally short visits to "Friedenheim."

The first time he came out to remain over night he brought with him Ralph and James Rivers, the sons of a deceased college friend for whom he was guardian.

This first visit was one long to be remembered by

the boys, everything was so new to them and enchanting; their journey on the train and arrival at Dorton Station, their walk in the glowing sunset across the flowery meadow to "Friedenheim," the warm welcome to that beautiful home, the joyous greeting of Roy and Cecil, the supper of fried chicken, oysters, Maryland biscuits and waffles, and after it, a visit to orchards, woods and brook, accompanied by Mose, the colored waiter, and by the pet dogs of Roy and Cecil; then their return to the piazza, where sat the elders of the family, enjoying the serene beauty of the evening. All was a delight to the two city boys who had never had so many pleasant things crowded into one evening.

They were on the piazza but a short time when Mose, who had left them at the gate to go to his place in the kitchen, came to the lattice and whispered to Cecil, who happened to be nearest, "Ax your mother if you can't come out in de kitchen. Aunt Kitty will give us roasted apples and cream, and pop-corn, and Aunt Chloe will have molasses candy for us, and bline Israel is comin' and will sing."

"All right, I know she will let us," was the response, and Mose hurried back to give notice, that preparations for the entertainment of the visitors might be quickly commenced.

"Who is Aunt Kitty and Chloe and Israel?" inquired James.

"Kitty is the cook and is Moses' grandmother. Chloe was our nurse, but is now helper in everything, and Israel is an old man who goes from house to house to saw wood. He lives in the alms-house in winter and works all summer, and is the tallest and blackest person I ever saw. He is blind, does not know darkness from daylight, but sings. You never heard such a grand voice as Israel has. Mamma says it is so mournfully sweet that she feels like weeping when she hears it."

"Who else is out there?"

"No one but Uncle Andy; he is the oldest person in the neighborhood. Papa and Uncle Val say that he was the best servant on the place when able to work."

"What does he do now?"

"He brings in cobs and shells peas, and other light

work to help Kitty. He loves to count his coins, and we all give him the new, bright pieces we get. He sings hymns and nothing pleases him better than to admire his coins and praise his singing."

Mrs. Courtney gave consent and when the four boys reached the kitchen there was a general stir among their dusky entertainers until their guests had the best places about the great stone-flagged hearth, and although not more than two hours since they had finished supper, the impromptu cookery was relished.

In the most comfortable corner of the hearth sat Uncle Andy, his white wool glistening in the firelight, and which illumined every corner of the large kitchen. It was the first hickory wood and cob fire the boys had ever seen, and they admired it greatly.

"We have told Ralph and James how well you sing, Uncle Andy," said Roy; "we told them you are fond of music."

" 'Deed I is, honey; 'deed I is!" confirmed Andy gleefully, " 'kase dar is a promise, honey, dar suttinly is a promise to dem dat likes music."

"Won't you sing something, Uncle Andy? We all want to hear you."

"Suttinly, honey, suttinly!" and leaning his head upon the back of his high chair he sang a favorite hymn, adding stanza after stanza of his own improvising, and keeping time with his foot, Kitty, Chloe and Mose joining in the chorus. The boys expressed such genuine pleasure in the concert that hymn followed hymn, Andy reviving the melodies of his boyhood for their entertainment.

"Yes, honey, yes;" he commented after pausing for breath, "music an' love is what heaven is made of; it wouldn't be heaven widout music an' love."

"But there are people who don't like music, Uncle Andy," remarked Roy.

"Den, honey, ol' Andy wouldn't gib much for der chance for heaven, 'deed he wouldn't, honey. What'll dey do because of de music if dey does git to heaven? Mind I says *if*, honey; mind I says *if*."

Before the magnitude of this query could be lessened, a shuffling of feet was heard outside, followed by a knock upon the door.

"It's Israel!" ejaculated Mose jubilantly, "Marse

Merryman's Perry said he had done sawed all their wood, an' he was gwine to bring him over here this evenin'."

He hurried to the door, and reaching out a helping hand, brought the blind wood-sawer in triumph to the hearth, followed by Perry, who was expected by Mrs. Merryman to return home immediately, but who remained all evening.

"These here two boys is our boys, Israel," said Mose, as master of ceremonies, "and these two other boys is visitin' us from Baltimore; and, boys, this here man is bline Israel."

"Dat is jist like you, Mose, 'mindin' folks ob der 'flictions. What's de use of sayin' 'bline Isrel'!" rebuked Uncle Andy.

"Israel don't keer, he says so his own self," replied Mose nonchalantly.

"Of course I does, Brudder Andy," said Israel, towering above them and removing his pipe to his left hand to give his right to the old man.

"Don't let him off so easy, Brudder Isrel," said Andy, in high good humor, "or he'll be sayin' yer is deaf an' dumb."

"Words speak louder dan actions, Brudder Andy," replied Israel, benignly.

"Take this chair, Israel," said Roy, leading him to one. "We staid here to see you and hear you talk and sing."

"Mighty kind in you, I'm shore, young marsters."

"'Pears like ol' times to see yer, Brudder Isrel," said Andy, preparing to fill his pipe. "Kitty done say dis mornin', she did, 'whar's Uncle Isrel, dat he ain't been round dis fall?'"

"It's mighty comfotable here, Brudder Andy, that is a fac'," asserted Israel as Roy gently relieved him of his cane and placed it in a corner.

"Put some more cobs on the fire, you Mose, and hand Uncle Isrel a coal to light his pipe; it is done gone out," said Chloe, hospitably.

"Maybe the young marsters don't like the smell of the pipe?" suggested Israel, hesitating between respect for them and his longing for a smoke.

"Oh, don't mind us," said the boys cordially, "we want you to feel at home."

"Dey is all well-mannered boys," remarked Uncle

Andy complacently; "I has done a heap towards trainin' our two. I allus says, 'Boys, let us ol' culled folks hab de dirty pipes, 'kase we can't be spiled; but don't yer sile yer nice clean mouves wid no whiskey nor terbaccy.' An' dey has promised; an' ol' Andy kin trust 'em."

"Gabe promised too, but he smoked and chawed all the same," remarked Chloe as she took her pipe and tobacco from her pocket.

"Oh, dat Gabe is a hippercrite, I allus knowd'd dat; not like dese yer boys nohow," replied Andy, between puffs of his pipe.

"I ain't never gwine to smoke," interposed Mose, not willing to be overlooked.

"Better wait 'till yer axed," suggested Kitty.

"Well, how was dey gittin' along in de pore-house when yer lef', Brudder Isrel?" inquired Andy.

"Oh, fust-rate, what is left of de old stock, but dar is a heap of changes in the pore-house as well as in other places, Brudder Andy. Some of the ol' residenters have gone to dar long home, and dar places are done filled. Gabe Websta was one of de late arrivals."

"What is dat?" cried Andy in amazement, while Aunt Kitty and Mose gazed upon him in consternation, and Chloe removed her pipe to listen. "Yer suttenly don't mean our Gabe Websta?" he questioned.

"I is sorry to inform you, Brudder Andy, that Gabe is at this moment in the pore-house; he was took up as a wagrant early this fall."

"As a wagrant!" echoed Andy, rolling up his eyes and shaking his frosty head. "Now ain't it too bad dat anybody dat had de raisen dat boy had wid ol' Marse Courtney, has done gone an' disgraced hisself?"

"You know that he never would work, Uncle Andy," remarked Kitty. "Ol' missus used to say that it was more bother to make Gabe work than his work was wuth."

"Dat boy was born on Christmas day, an' has been keepin' Christmas ebber since," commented Andy; "he'd jist like to set by de cob fire all winter, an' go ter sleep in de sun all summer, an' let de hoein' take keer of itself. I allus tole him dat his laziness would done fotch him to jail, but I never

mistrusted dat he would stop at de pore-house on his way."

"Dar is wus places than the pore-house, Brudder Andy," remarked Israel with dignity.

"Dat's so, Brudder Isrel; 'deed dat is jis' so! I is makin' no deflections on de pore-house, but on dat misable Gabe Websta. De pore-house is fur 'flicted pussons an' dem dat is too ol' ter work, not for sich as Gabe."

"Gabe says he is not able to work; he done says he has the rheumatiz," supplemented Israel.

"He allus had som'thin' or 'nother all his days, 'cept on Sattuday afternoons an' Sundays, an' 'lection days an' Christmas week; at dem times Gabe was allus in a good state ob health."

"Maybe he has the rheumatiz for certain to pay him up for playin' 'possum so many times," suggested Chloe.

"Maybe Chloe is right, Uncle Andy," interposed Roy. "Let Israel, when he goes back, ask the overseer to get a doctor to investigate."

"If Gabe wants to stay in de pore-house dar had better be no 'westigations," said Uncle Andy with

energy. "He'll get turned out fo' shore; he can't fool dem doctahs like he fooled ol' missus."

"Gabe has had spells of rheumatiz afore, has he, Brudder Andy?" asked Israel.

"Yes, every time dar was a big job ob work on hand."

"Ol' missus used to send him to hunt eggs," said Chloe, "and he'd just lay down on the hay and go to sleep. He'd go to sleep standin' up keepin' the flies off the table, that Gabe would."

"Nobody could do nothin' wid dat boy noways," said Uncle Andy, reflectively; "he'll hab to wait till all de folks dat know him is gone dead afore he plays dat game ob de rheumatiz an' de pore-house. Jis' now he's like de folks dat wear eye-glasses to pop on an' off as suits de 'casion; when he done gits de rheumatiz right, he'll be like de people dat wears specs; dat means business."

"Uncle Andy, won't you sing, and let the others join in the chorus?" asked Cecil. "It will be splendid now that Israel is here."

"To be shore we will sing, honey! What will you hab?"

Before Cecil could make choice Uncle Andy broke into that melody so dear to his race—"Roll, Jordan, Roll," and Israel's deep, pathetic voice thrilled the hearts of the city boys as no other had done; no noted concert singer had tones so full and grand as issued from his powerful chest without effort or thought that he was making an impression upon his listeners.

"There is one thing that Gabe could do," remarked Kitty, when the last notes died away in perfect accord, "he could sing like a seraphim; that 'Roll, Jordan, Roll' was his favorite."

"Dat is so; dat is jis' so!" agreed Uncle Andy, whose feelings were softened by the melody, "and I'll tell yer what was passin' in my mind while we was singin'. I is gwine to write a letter to Gabe dis yer berry night. Roy, honey, bring de pen; Kitty, clar dat table; I's gwine ter write dis yer hour an' tell Gabe Websta ter gib up de rheumatiz an' go ter work."

"Oh, Uncle Andy, Gabe won't be in a hurry to get that letter; wait till mornin'," said Kitty.

"No, now is de 'cepted time, Kitty. If de doctahs

git to 'westigatin' it 'll knock Gabe higher 'n a kite; he'll git well ob dat rheumatiz, an' be popped out 'n dat pore-house whar my letter will nebber jine him. No, sah! Dat letter has done got ter be writ dis yer ebenin'."

"To-morrow would be airly enough," said Kitty, preparing to arrange the table for the writing materials.

"You is allus puttin' off, Kitty. Dat is de way ol' Satan gits de souls ob sinners; dey help him dar ownselves by puttin' off. Git de writin' utenshils, Roy, honey."

While Roy was gone, Andy had the table rolled to his chair and was ruminating over the prospective contents of the epistle when he returned.

"How shall I commence it, Uncle Andy?" Roy asked.

"Dear Gabe," suggested Chloe.

"No, I is gwine ter say no sich thing!" said Andy irately, the softening influence of the music having lost its effect when he had reflected upon Gabe's delinquencies. "He's not 'dear Gabe' ter onybody but

de pore-house and dem dat has him ter keep; mighty cheap Gabe in my mind."

"'Respected Gabe,' or 'Esteemed Gabe,'" suggested Roy, with waiting pen in hand.

"No, he is none ob dat! 'Lazy Gabe' is de only 'pendix dat fits him."

"But it would not look well to commence a letter that way," said Roy.

"No, honey, ol' Andy knows dat. Folks hab to be 'ceitful in dis yer wicked world. I suppect yer'll hab ter say, 'dear Gabe,'" he agreed regretfully.

Roy jotted it down quickly, thinking another discussion might arise.

"It'll be berry short, honey, jes' say 'You Gabe Websta, come out 'en dat pore-house afore de doctahs hab a chance to 'westigate, an' gib yer wuthless place to some 'flicted creetur dat ain't playin' 'possum, an' go ter work an' airn your livin', an' may de Lord hab mercy on yer soul.'"

"But Uncle Andy," said Roy, when the old man paused for breath, "that is what a judge says when a person is sentenced to the gallows."

"Dat tex' 'plies to anybody, honey, 'kase we is all sinnahs, an' we'se all got ter die."

Roy proceeded with the epistle, softening it as much as possible, signed Andy's name to it, stamped and addressed it, and Andy gave it to Perry to mail.

"Thanky, thanky, honey! If Gabe goes ter sleep ober dat letta I done hope de doctahs will 'westigate an' pop him out 'n dat pore-house;" and, serenity restored, Andy was ready to sing and as soon as the sweet notes of "I've Been Redeemed" died away Mrs. Courtney rang the bell for prayers. Israel went to the library with the others and Perry went home.

When Ralph and James went to their room that night they stood gazing for some time from their windows upon "My Lady's Manor," beautiful under the light of the full moon. From the servants' quarters could be heard the same plaintive airs to which they had listened that evening, accompanied by banjo and violin, and they expressed to each other the wish that they might see the place before returning to Baltimore.

"Uncle Val," said Cecil the next morning, "may

we go to 'My Lady's Manor?' Ralph and James would like to see it."

A look of pain crossed Mr. Courtney's face, but he gave permission. "I have a message," he continued, "and now is perhaps the best time to send it; while there, please tell the servants of the death of Miss Anna Ashburton; they loved her and should no longer be kept in ignorance of it."

Breakfast finished, the four boys hurried away, and as they drew near Mrs. Ashley's cottage they saw Hilda Brinsfield standing at the gate with a white rabbit in her arms.

"What a beautiful little girl," said Ralph in a low tone; "she is the loveliest creature I ever saw."

"That is what we all think," responded Cecil. "Mother says that with her blue eyes and golden hair she reminds her of the angels we see in pictures."

The fishpond, the dove-cote and orchard belonging to "My Lady's Manor" were visited, then they halted at the servants' quarters and obtained the key, unlocked the front door, passed in and closed it behind them.

With almost awe at the silence, they went through the dim, richly furnished rooms, then mounted the stairs to have a view from the roof.

So full of interest was the sight of their native city to Ralph and James that it was near noon when they descended. Talking gaily, they reached the attic, and were surprised to see a little old lady in black slowly receding toward the back room.

Roy and Cecil had heard through the colored people of the apparition which made them afraid to pass the mansion late at night, but had been trained to have no belief in the supernatural, so without hesitation followed.

The spectre had glided through the door of the back attic room, but when they reached it, it was empty and silent; and perplexed, they descended to the quarters to give up the key and to deliver the message in regard to Miss Ashburton.

The boys were aware of the servants' attachment to their young mistress, but were not expecting the outburst of grief the disclosure of her death called forth, as they sobbed and moaned in the abandonment of woe, genuine and awe-stricken from the

suddenness with which a long cherished hope had been shattered.

"We can't stay here no more," cried Lois with streaming eyes, "we only stayed to keep the place nice for Miss Anna; she is done gone! She will never, never come, and we must go."

"Perhaps the owner of 'My Lady's Manor' will like you to stay," suggested Roy, deeply touched, as were the other boys.

"No, we can't stay; Miss Anna is done gone, this is no home for us no more! Pore Miss Anna that was kept out of the home that ol' missus done give her! She was so pretty and sweet and kind and would have been living and well and happy if she hadn't been turned out of her home. Pore Miss Anna!"

When the boys returned to "Friedenheim" they gave a full account of their visit, and after they had gone to the lawn for a game of ball, their elders sat in the seclusion of the library and wondered, as they had always done, over the mystery of the apparition.

The servants left the next day for one of the

lower counties of Maryland, and "My Lady's Manor" was deserted. Silence reigned in the servants' quarters as well as in the spacious rooms of the mansion; sunlight was shut out and spiders spun their webs in the door-ways of the cabins, as well as between the lofty pillars of the piazza.

CHAPTER V

HILDA'S NEW CARE-TAKER

Two days after the accident which had caused Mrs. Warfield to return to her farmhouse with nerves so disturbed by terror, pain and grief that she was ill for several weeks, little Hilda Brinsfield was playing under the shade of an apple tree in the garden back of the cottage of Mrs. Ashley, it being one of the ideal days frequently enjoyed even in early spring.

"Hilda," called a subdued voice from the window, "come in, dear, and stay by your aunt while I get supper."

The little girl made no response, but laying her doll upon the bank beside her, she took up a book and applied herself diligently to spelling the words of three letters which described the gay pictures.

"Hilda!" And now Diana Strong was sitting beside her with one of her little hands in hers.

"Oh, child," she said in an endearing tone, "you

will regret it some day that you are not willing to leave your play to sit a few minutes beside the sweet lady who loves you so dearly! Come now, come!"

A frown darkened the fair brow of the child, and, throwing the book upon the ground, her foot came down upon it with a quick, angry stamp.

Diana said no more, but taking her and the doll in her strong arms carried her to the house in spite of her struggles for release, and, putting her down by the door of Mrs. Ashley's room, gently pushed her in. Ill as she was, the flashing eyes and flushed cheeks of the little girl attracted the attention of Mrs. Ashley, and she sighed deeply.

"My darling is angry again," she said feebly. "Who will take care of her and teach her self-control?"

"Diana made me leave my new book," replied Hilda tearfully. "She held me so tight in her arms that it hurt me, and I could not get loose. Send her away, Aunt Janette, I don't like her! Please send her away!"

A look of pain came into the sweet face of Mrs

Ashley and she clasped her hands as if in supplication.

"Diana is very tired," she said after a pause. "She has lost much sleep in the week that I have been ill."

"I am tired, too, and want my supper," responded Hilda fretfully.

"Diana will soon have a nice supper for you, and while she is preparing it you can lie down beside me and rest."

Hilda was willing for this; she pushed a chair to the bedside, and, still clasping the doll in one arm, crept in.

The setting sun glowed ruddily through the western window, and the ticking of the clock upon the mantel, and the purring of the kitten before the smouldering wood fire upon the hearth were the only sounds which broke the stillness of the pleasant room.

"Your father named you Hilda for your sweet, young mother," said Mrs. Ashley, taking the child's hand in hers. "He loved his little daughter so tenderly that he gave her her mother's name. She was

lovely in disposition and patient, and I hope my little Hilda will be like her."

"Where are my father and mother now?"

"In heaven, my darling, where I hope soon to be with them and your dear Uncle Ashley."

"When will I go?"

"In God's own good time. Try to live each day aright, and then you will have a home with them and never be parted from them."

"Who will stay with me when you go?"

"My sister, Sarah Warfield, I hope. I have prayed for that, and God answers prayer."

"Why doesn't she write to you? You said you wanted a letter."

"Why not, oh, why not?" echoed Mrs. Ashley. "I do so long for a word from her."

"But I would rather go to heaven with you and my father and mother. What is heaven?"

"It is a beautiful home where we will live forever."

"And will we never come back?"

"No, we will be so happy we will never wish to come."

"Oh, I want to go now! Take me with you, Aunt Janette, to see my father and mother and Uncle Ashley!"

"Be patient, my love, and you will come. I cannot talk any more now; I am very weak, but will speak of it again when rested. I hope you will be polite and obedient to Diana; she is good and kind. What would we do without her?"

Hilda was silent, her thoughts busy with what she had just heard. Where was heaven? How could she get there? And what was being patient?

Diana had made good speed in preparing the evening meal, and brought a cup of tea and a slice of cream toast, daintily served, to the invalid.

"Any letter?" inquired Mrs. Ashley, eagerly scanning the countenance of the nurse as she drew near.

"No," replied Diana sadly. "Mr. Merryman's errand boy, Perry, passed just now on his way from the postoffice. I ran out and asked him if he had a letter for you, but there was none. I hoped you would not ask until you had taken your tea."

"Oh, Diana, two letters unanswered! Sister

Sarah is surely ill or she would write to me, whether she had received my letters or not. I know that she has much on her mind with the care of her two boys and the farming, and Ohio is some distance from here, but the reply to even my last letter has had time to reach me."

"Yes, there has been time," agreed Diana sympathizingly.

"She and my brother Herbert were opposed to my marriage to Mr. Ashley, but they were always loving and kind. They wrote affectionate letters to me as soon as they received my letter telling them that my husband had fallen in battle, and Sarah offered me a home with her, and said to bring Hilda. She was glad that I intended adopting her as my own, and said she would be much company for me."

"Yes, anyone would think so," agreed Diana as she drew a stand to the bedside and arranged the toast and tea upon it.

"I do not wish any tea, Diana. I had so hoped for a letter. Surely Sarah must write and give me the comfort of knowing that she will take Hilda when I am gone!"

"I am sure she will; we must give her time," answered Diana, soothingly.

"But Sarah is always prompt; a noble, active, Christian woman. There is no one on earth that I can look to but her, to train Hilda as she should be trained. Oh, if she would but write and give me the assurance! but I fear that Mr. Courtney did not tell her in the letter he wrote for me how ill I am;" and tears of anxiety and longing filled her beautiful eyes.

"Mr. Courtney said he would state the case exactly as it is, and ministers should do as they promise."

"Yes, Diana, so should we all; but you remember my heart troubled me so little that day that I fear he was deceived. You said yourself that I was the picture of health with my bright eyes, the flush upon my cheeks and lips, and my natural appearance in every way. Oh, I fear he gave Sarah the impression that there was no need of haste!"

"But you told him there was; he would be guided by what you said and not by how you looked."

"I believe that Dr. Lattinger is also deceived by

my appearance, but I knew when I took ill that I would not get well, and if it were not for my anxiety in regard to Hilda I would be glad to go. Heaven seems very near to me; I have so many loved ones there, so few on earth."

"I was thinking, ma'am," remarked Diana, "that maybe your sister is coming, and that is the reason she does not write."

A gleam of joy illumined Mrs. Ashley's face, and she partly arose and stretched out her arms as if to welcome her.

"Oh, Diana," she whispered, sinking back upon the pillow, "that would be such a happy thing; God grant that it may be so!"

"You say that she is prompt in her ways; she may not have waited to write, knowing that she could reach here as quickly as could a letter," she said comfortingly.

"Yes, Diana," smiled Mrs. Ashley, "that is the reason she does not write. She is coming! Dear heavenly Father," she continued, putting her small white hand upon the head of Hilda, "grant my heartfelt petition that this loved child be a consistent

Christian, and may her home and that of Sarah Warfield be one and the same."

Cheered by this hope and trust, Mrs. Ashley partook of the toast and tea with relish, and laid her head again upon the pillow with the smiling, happy expression of one who had never known pain or trial, causing Diana to again wonder that the week's illness had made no change in her beauty.

"I feel so much better, Diana," she said cheerfully. "Do you and Hilda go and take your tea together; do not mind leaving me alone. I have pleasant thoughts to keep me company. I shall see my sister—Sarah—Warfield—in the—morning."

The kitchen where the supper was prepared looked very bright and cheery to the little girl and the light tea biscuits, sweet butter and honey were delicious to her taste. She enjoyed the meal, then fell asleep in the chair where Diana let her remain until all was put in order for the night, then prepared her for rest and laid her beside Mrs. Ashley, who appeared to be in a sweet sleep.

Her own cot was in an opposite corner of the room, and after fastening the outer door she lighted

the night lamp, shading it from the sick bed, then, as was her custom, lay down without removing her clothing that she might be ready at any minute to wait upon the invalid.

She had, she thought, scarcely slept, when she was waked by a rap upon the outer door of the kitchen, and arose quickly that Mrs. Ashley might not be disturbed by a second knock.

What was her astonishment on opening the door to see the eastern horizon tinged with a ruddy glow, betokening sunrise!

"How is Mrs. Ashley this morning?" asked Dr. Lattinger as he stepped over the sill.

"She must have slept all night; I did not hear her speak or stir," replied Diana in bewilderment.

The doctor made no remark, but passed quickly through to the other room, followed by Diana bearing the lighted lamp.

"She has been dead several hours," he said, taking the lifeless hand in his.

"Oh, doctor, do not think I neglected her!" exclaimed Diana, with blanched face and trembling with grief and excitement. "She was so much bet-

ter last evening and ate a slice of toast and drank a cup of tea. Oh, how I wish now I had not lain down!"

"You were worn out with watching and should not have been left alone," said Dr. Lattinger kindly.

"Any of the neighbors would have come had I asked it. I did not have an idea that anyone was needed."

"Who would you like to have with you? I will call any place you specify. In the meantime it would be better to remove the little girl to the cot, that she may not know when first waking that her aunt is gone."

"I will, doctor; and if you are going out upon your rounds please call at 'Friedenheim' and ask Mrs. Courtney to come. Mrs. Ashley admired her, and said she reminded her of her sister, Mrs. Warfield."

"I am on my way home and have just passed 'Friedenheim;' but it will be no trouble to drive back and tell Mrs. Courtney, and I hope she can come."

Dr. Lattinger left and Diana removed Hilda to

the cot, then sat by the bedside of Mrs. Ashley and wept without restraint.

It took but a few minutes for the doctor to reach the lane gate that led to the main entrance of "Friedenheim."

His ring of the door bell was answered by Mose, who informed him that Mrs. Courtney was suffering with sick headache and was unable to go.

Disappointed, Dr. Lattinger turned away and in a few minutes reached home, where he sat down to breakfast, weary and listless, having been all night beside a sick bed.

"Diana Strong needs someone to assist her this morning," he said, when a good cup of coffee had refreshed him. "Mrs. Ashley died during the night and Diana is there alone. I called at 'Friedenheim' to ask Mrs. Courtney to go, but she is in bed with one of her attacks of sick headache, and it is impossible for her to give aid."

"Of course, Diana feels the responsibility," rejoined Mrs. Lattinger. "Mrs. Ashley had no relatives and her reserved disposition prevented her making acquaintances. 'My Lady's Manor' was the

only place she visited, and after Anna Ashburton left it she had not one whom she could call a friend. I wonder why Diana selected Mrs. Courtney?"

"She said that Mrs. Ashley admired her greatly, and said she reminded her of her sister, Mrs. Warfield."

"I doubt, however, if Mrs. Courtney could have done what will be required. A burial robe will have to be made unless Diana sends to Baltimore for one."

"I think she is at a loss to know what to do. Perhaps you can go down and advise her. She is depending upon me to send someone."

"I cannot possibly go from home to-day, for I have invited Mrs. Merryman and Mrs. Watkins to luncheon, and Jerusha Flint is coming this morning to cut and fit a dress for me, and if I disappoint her she would take pleasure in refusing to come another day."

"If she can make burial dresses perhaps she would go and help Diana."

"No one could be of more help than Jerusha in

every way, if she will go. And I will be glad to postpone my work until another day."

"Well, see that someone goes," said the doctor, as he arose and went to his office, and at that moment a light, brisk step was heard upon the porch, followed by a sharp peal of the bell.

"There she is now," thought Mrs. Lattinger, as she arose to admit Jerusha. "I will tell her before she lays aside her bonnet."

The moment the door opened Jerusha, erect, neat, and with perfectly fitting walking dress, stepped in, her eyes like black beads and her cheeks flushed from her mile walk in the clear morning air.

"Where is my pay to come from?" she asked sharply, when Mrs. Lattinger made the situation known. "There is no charge for making a burial dress for a neighbor, and I cannot afford to lose my day."

"The doctor feels it incumbent to send someone, having promised Diana. I suppose there is money in the house; if not, we will see that you are paid for it."

"That settles it!" responded Miss Flint, promptly,

and, turning abruptly, she left the house and walked with her usual dispatch down the road, looking neither to the right nor to the left until she reached the cottage.

Diana was still alone, with the exception of Hilda, who was taking her breakfast, and her face clouded at sight of Miss Flint.

"Mrs. Courtney is sick and could not come," explained Jerusha, reading Diana's face like an open book, "and Mrs. Lattinger took it upon herself to ask me to come, so I am that accommodating individual known as 'Jack-in-a-Pinch'; what's to be done now that I am here?"

"I don't know; that is why I wished someone to come."

"Has no patient that you have nursed died until now?"

"Yes, but there were always plenty of relatives and friends to make arrangements; my duty was done and I went home."

"Well, the first thing I will do is to lay aside my hat and cape, seeing the lady of the house is not polite enough to ask me."

"Oh, please excuse me!" said Diana, reddening; "I really forgot it."

"No harm done," said Miss Flint, as she shook her cape with a vigorous snap, folded it and placed it on the pillow of the lounge and laid her hat upon it. "Had she no relatives?"

Miss Flint had nodded toward the other room while smoothing her raven hair with the palms of her hands until it shone like satin, and Diana had no difficulty in understanding.

"Yes, she has a brother and sister in Ohio. Her sister, Mrs. Warfield, has been written to twice, but has not answered either letter. They were opposed to her marrying Mr. Ashley; she told me so herself, last evening, poor dear;" and Diana's eyes filled at the remembrance.

"No wonder they were opposed," commented Miss Flint as she glanced about the neat but simply furnished room. "If she had possessed the common sense that a woman of her appearance should have had, she would have been opposed, too."

"It may be that they won't pay any attention to her, or it may be that Mrs. Warfield is on her way

here," resumed Diana. "I do hope she is, for I want to get away. I feel it such a responsibility."

"What is to be done with her?" asked Miss Flint, nodding toward Hilda. "She will be in our way."

"I might stop the miller's children on their way to school and ask them to take Hilda home with them, or ask one of them to come here for company for her; their mother will, I am sure, oblige in a case like this."

"Let her go there, for mercy's sake!" responded Jerusha sharply. "We will have two to bother with if one of them comes here."

"There they come now!" said Diana. "I will run out and ask them."

Fortune favored; one of the children was glad to return home and take Hilda with her, and Miss Flint was gratified to hear that the miller's family would keep her until after the funeral; and the way was now clear for business.

"Now if Mrs. Warfield would come, how thankful I would be!" sighed Diana as she set aside the remains of the breakfast.

"But we cannot wait for that. What is to be done about a burial dress?"

"I don't know," responded Diana anxiously. "Do you take the lead and I will help you all I can."

"What I want to know is, will it be made here, or bought ready made in Baltimore?" questioned Miss Flint sharply.

"I really cannot decide. Which do you advise?"

"That depends upon circumstances. What is there in the house?"

"Do you mean money?"

"Yes, money or clothes, or material to make a burial dress of," snapped Miss Jerusha impatiently.

"There is a bureau in her room with her clothing in two of the drawers; the third one is locked; I don't know what is in it."

"Where is the key?"

"In the upper drawer in a little box."

"We can soon see; come!"

"I really cannot; not while she is in there," said Diana, shrinkingly.

"Why, there is where she will have to be until

taken to the grave; you certainly are not thinking of having her brought out here?"

"Oh, no; but it seems so hard to go in and unlock her bureau when she is unable to prevent us."

"We don't want to be prevented. Somebody must attend to this; come along and give me the key."

They went, Diana shading her eyes from the still form on the bed. The drawer was unlocked and a white cashmere burial robe was found, covered by a sheet of white tissue paper.

"Just as I expected the moment you told me that the lower drawer was locked," remarked Miss Flint. "She was exactly the woman to prepare for this in order to be independent of her neighbors. Well, it saves a day's work, so I am not the one to complain."

Sustained by the self-reliance of her companion, Diana became of "some use," as Miss Flint expressed it, and did as directed with many a longing to be away from it all.

The beautiful form of Mrs. Ashley was neatly

arrayed in the robe and Diana waited for further orders.

"Give me a pair of scissors and I will cut off a lock of her hair; her sister may want it. But stop, you need not go! I have mine with me."

"I don't see how you can bear to cut off her hair," said Diana nervously, as the snip, snip of the scissors fell upon her ear.

"It is lovely," commented Miss Flint as she held up a glossy tress, "and it curls naturally."

"Yes, many a rich woman would give half she possesses for such a splendid head of hair, and could envy her in many ways. Mrs. Lattinger said she was a lovely young creature when she came as a bride to Dorton, and has changed very little since. Now she looks like one of the beautiful marble statues in the Peabody Institute, if it were not for the long, dark lashes resting upon her cheeks."

"She was a beauty and no mistake, but as proud as Lucifer. Pride and poverty killed that woman, or my name is not Jerusha Flint."

"She was always kind and gentle and polite to me," responded Diana tearfully.

"Polite, oh certainly! But she made you know your place, I'll warrant. I wonder that one as proud as she was would marry a poor artist. Now you can fix her hair the way she wore it, and while you are doing it I will watch at the gate for someone who can be trusted to send the undertaker."

"Oh, please don't leave me!" exclaimed Diana, dropping the comb. "Do you stay here and let me watch at the gate."

"Well, you are the poorest creature I ever did see. You are not afraid of her, are you?" asked Jerusha derisively.

"Oh, no, but I feel so nervous. If I had kept awake last night and known if she needed anything I would not feel so miserable."

"Kept awake!" echoed her companion in astonishment. "I hope you don't mean to say that you let her die alone?"

"She passed away while I was asleep," said Diana humbly. "I thought her so much better!"

"Thought her better, and you a trained nurse, calling yourself a watcher; a professional, if you please!"

"You cannot make me feel more self-condemned than I am," sighed Diana tearfully, "but I have the comfort of knowing that if she could speak she would grant me her forgiveness. She was a saint on earth if ever there was one."

"I fail to see how she could be with all that pride; she scarcely noticed me."

"I am sure it was not pride. She was very retiring in disposition, and the neighbors may not have tried to make her acquaintance."

"Because she showed by her manner that she considered herself above us. No one suited her highness except Mrs. Farnsworth and Anna and Mrs. Courtney; and it is plain to be seen that their elegant homes were the attraction. I wonder that she was so anxious to be friends with them when her home was so poor."

"But all is comfortable and pretty," replied Diana glancing about her, "and she kept it in beautiful order."

"Well, what she did and what she did not do is no concern of ours. What we have to do is to bow

these shutters and sit down and wait for someone to go for the undertaker."

Diana went outside to watch, and while she was gone Miss Flint stood in the doorway between the rooms and took a look over the objects of beauty and utility contained therein, and over her grim lips passed a satisfied smile.

"Yes," she said to herself, "it is the very plan; and trust Jerusha Flint to carry out any scheme she determines upon. Yes, it shall be done!"

Diana in the meantime had unhooked the shutters, bowed them, and returned with the intelligence that Perry had been sent over by Mrs. Merryman to offer his services, and had gone to Dorton to see the undertaker, and, that care removed, they could think of other things.

"What time will you set for the funeral?" asked Diana.

"That will depend upon Mr. Courtney. If he can preach the sermon to-morrow afternoon that will be the time to appoint. I will go over to 'Friedenheim' after the undertaker has been here and ask him."

"But isn't that very soon? She died only—"

"You were asleep and know nothing about it," interrupted Jerusha sarcastically. "What would be the use of waiting for her sister who has not set a time for coming? And there is no one in the neighborhood who cares when she is buried."

Perry had returned and, to the relief of Diana, could remain as long as wanted, so the moment the undertaker departed Miss Flint hurried to "Friedenheim," saw Rev. Courtney, who made it convenient to conduct the services the following afternoon, and thus far the plan was working well.

Her next call was upon the owner of the cottage, who was willing to allow her to live there in Mrs. Ashley's place, the rent having been paid by the year, and she returned in exuberant spirits.

"I will tell you what I have been doing," she said, her black eyes sparkling and her cheeks glowing with the brisk walk. "There is no one to care for Hilda, so I will stay here until Mrs. Warfield comes."

"Oh, that is so kind of you!" said Diana eagerly. "I never for a moment thought you would stay. I

thought you had such a good home with my sister-in-law and your brother."

"There is where I stop," replied Miss Flint with emphasis. "I told Horace the very day he brought his wife there that his house would be my home only while I could not have a better one. I have the chance now to have one more to my liking and am going to take it. I will stay here until Mrs. Warfield comes, and then can decide what course to take."

In her own mind she did not believe that Mrs. Warfield would ever come, but she kept her opinion to herself.

"Hilda is no relation of Mrs. Warfield's, I think you said," she remarked after a pause.

"No, she was Mr. Ashley's niece, not Mrs. Ashley's; but Mrs. Warfield will surely take her when she hears that it was her sister's last request."

Miss Flint had another plan in her mind but she said nothing about it to Diana; and that was that as soon as the funeral was over the next afternoon, and Diana gone, she would go immediately about arranging the furniture to suit herself, and then

walk to her brother's house in the village and make arrangements with him to have her effects brought to her new abode.

All these plans fell into line at the proper place; the funeral was over, a long train of neighbors following the bier to the Dorton churchyard, but among them not one relative or near friend of the departed.

Diana remained at the cottage until Miss Flint returned; then, being as eager to leave as Jerusha was to have the house to herself, she was not slow in taking the hint that her company could be dispensed with, and left for the village.

In the kindness of her heart she went out of her way to call at the miller's to tell Hilda of the changes in her home.

"Yes, I know," assented the little girl; "she told me she was going to heaven and will see my father and mother and Uncle Ashley."

"You are to go back now, Hilda," said Diana, her eyes filling with tears. "Miss Flint is so kind as to take care of you until Mrs. Warfield comes."

The miller's little girl saw her safely to the cot-

tage gate, and bade her good-bye with a parting kiss.

"What brought you here until I sent for you?" exclaimed Miss Flint angrily, as Hilda stepped in. "I am just going out."

"Diana told me to come," said Hilda, cowering; "she said you were so kind as to take care of me."

"Just like the meddlesome wretch! Now I will have to stay at home or drag you along with me."

Hilda began to cry, and Miss Flint could scarcely restrain herself from laying violent hands upon her, while every nerve thrilled.

"Stop crying instantly, or I will give you something to cry for!" she said harshly.

"I wish I were in heaven," sobbed the child.

"You cannot wish it any more than I do! You could well be spared from here."

Hilda raised her head and looked with earnest gaze at Miss Flint.

"What are you staring at? Get a book or something and stare at it."

"I left my new book under the apple tree; please open the door for me."

Her companion was glad to comply, and Hilda returned quickly with it, and, sitting in her little chair, examined it with the look of having regained a lost friend.

"I am glad you have a pretty book," remarked Miss Flint, calling what she flattered herself was a pleasant smile to her aid. "I am going out for a little while and you must not stir from that chair until I come back;" and hastily donning her wraps she locked the door, put the key in her pocket and walked rapidly to Dorton.

After arranging for the removal of her possessions, she called to see Mrs. Lattinger to say that she would come next morning to fit the dress, and then set out for the cottage.

She considered that her absence was short, but to Hilda it appeared endless. It was growing dark and she imagined that Miss Flint had left her to pass the night alone. She was a timid child, and Miss Flint's harshness had made her nervous, and her sobs and cries were pitiful.

She had obeyed the mandate to stay in the chair; and opposite was a lounge with cretonne cover, the

ruffle of which reached the floor. She saw this ruffle move, and when something peeped out and quickly withdrew, her terror was beyond control.

Miss Flint's anger broke forth when she found her in this state upon her return.

"How dare you act so, you spiteful creature?" she cried, shaking her violently.

"I saw something come from under the lounge," gasped the child convulsively.

"It is a falsehood, a wicked falsehood!" and going to the lounge she raised the ruffle. "You see there is nothing under there! You are only acting this way to keep me from going out again."

"I did see something!" screamed Hilda, stamping her foot in her excitement; "they were two black fingers."

"Two black fingers!" echoed Miss Flint, derisively; "where are they now? They must have been alive if they moved."

"They did move; I saw them come out and go back!"

"You little vixen!" cried Jerusha, grasping her; "if you don't hush I will—"

A voice at the door silenced her and caused Hilda to cower in her chair.

"I was coming from Dorton," said Perry, "and heard somebody crying, so stopped to see what was up."

"I was out for a little while," said Jerusha, turning scarlet, "and Hilda got frightened. She thought she saw two black fingers come from under the lounge."

"When people are scared they see lots of things. I have, myself. You won't see them now that Miss Jerusha is here. Good-night to you both," and Perry went on to "Fair Meadow" and they were again by themselves.

"Now you see what your wicked story-telling has done," exclaimed Miss Flint when Perry was out of hearing. "You see he did not believe you. Two black fingers, indeed!"

"I did see them!" screamed Hilda, flushed with excitement and passion.

"Now look here," cried Miss Flint, pale with anger and her eyes glowing as she grasped the child's arm, "if you say that again I will give you such a

whipping as will last you a lifetime. I have a mind to do it as it is."

Hilda cowered in her chair. She was a match for her tormentor in spirit but not in strength; she was vanquished and sat trembling with vague terror.

No more words were spoken until supper was upon the table, then Hilda was bidden to come, or not, if that suited her better, and she accepted and took her usual place, though too disturbed to do justice to the simple but well served meal.

As soon as it was finished Miss Flint put the room in order for the night, while Hilda returned to her chair and watched her quick, impatient movements.

"Come, you must go to bed now," was the command. "I must sit down to my sewing and want you out of my way."

"Please let the door be open; I am afraid in the dark," pleaded the child.

"What, of the two black fingers?"

Hilda drew back shuddering and tears rushed to her eyes.

"Come along, I have no time to waste upon you. Can't you unhook your dress?"

"Diana did it after Aunt Janette got sick. I cannot reach the hooks."

"You are old enough to wait upon yourself and will soon find that I am not a waiting-maid for you," and, giving an angry jerk to a refractory hook, the dress was loosened and other garments removed, and the little girl crept into the cot, which Miss Flint designated as her resting place.

"Won't you hear me say my prayers?" she asked timidly as her care-taker was leaving the room.

"You have great need to say them. I wonder you are not afraid to go to sleep after telling such a wicked story," and, taking the lamp, she went out, shutting the door after her.

Miss Flint sat down to her sewing in the clean and pleasant room, but she was not happy. She at last had a home of her own, but considered the incumbrance that went with it overbalanced the benefit.

She had not thought that her patrons would object to her taking Hilda to their homes in her dress-

making visits, but realized that she was mistaken, as she saw with her sister-in-law's eyes that there would come rainy days when Hilda could not go; and if clear the child could not stand the walks she would be compelled to take if she accompanied Jerusha, nor could she be left alone in the cottage.

Weary and sad, she leaned back in her chair and reflected; and her glance happening to rest upon the curtain of the lounge, she saw it move. Jerusha was not frightened, although she was wise enough to know that there could not be an effect without a cause.

The motion was repeated; the head of a mouse peeped out and was quickly withdrawn, and she recognized one of the black fingers that had alarmed Hilda.

"Enjoy yourself all you can to-night, my lively friend," she said to herself. "If a trap can catch you this will be the last chance you will have to frighten anybody."

She took care, however, not to enlighten Hilda as to her discovery and for many days the child avoided the lounge, fearing the "black fingers."

CHAPTER VI

HILDA A LITERAL FOLLOWER OF BUNYAN

"Fair Meadow," the home of the Merryman family for generations, was a large old-time farmhouse, built of gray stone, with dormer windows in the roof, broad window and door sills, and within and without gave the assurance of genuine home comfort, peace and good-will.

It lay between "My Lady's Manor" and "Friedenheim," within a short distance of each, and save for a wide lane and a meadow, would have been opposite the cottage of Jerusha Flint, on the other side of the road. It was a true Christian home, and its influence, like that of the Courtneys, was felt throughout the neighborhood.

The Merrymans were generous, genial people, and entertained city and country friends with cordial hospitality, but it was seldom that the farmhouse wore such a festive appearance as upon one evening the middle of the February following the

summer and autumn that Jerusha Flint held possession of the cottage.

The occasion was a reception in honor of a bride and groom, the bride being Mr. Merryman's sister, married at her father's residence in Baltimore and returning that evening from a southern tour.

Snow had fallen the day before, which necessitated sending sleighs instead of carriages to Dorton Station for the bridal party, and Mrs. Merryman, seeing her husband drive down the lane in the lead of three other sleighs, realized that time had passed too rapidly; the guests would soon be there, and she was not dressed to receive them.

With a satisfied glance at the supper table—brilliant with silver, china and glass—she was hurrying up the stair-way to her dressing-room when she heard a feeble knock upon the hall door, and, retracing her steps, she opened it.

A poor wanderer stood with hat in hand waiting there; the wind was toying with his gray locks, his thin garments protected him but poorly from the cold, and through his broken shoes could be seen his stockingless feet.

"They are all busy preparing supper; you need not wait," she answered hurriedly in response to his humble appeal for a cup of hot coffee.

"No, Archie won't wait," said the wanderer, turning meekly away. "Archie is hungry and tired, and the snow is cold, but Archie won't wait."

Closing the door quickly, Mrs. Merryman went to her room, dressed as speedily as possible and descended in time to receive Mrs. Courtney, who passed on up to the guest chamber to remove her wraps and be in readiness to help receive.

Mrs. Merryman had no anxiety for the successful serving of the supper, and later the refreshments, for in addition to her own efficient maid, Norah, Diana Strong had the management, and through the kindness of Mrs. Courtney, Kitty was her helper, while Mose, in white apron and gloves, was proud to have been loaned to wait upon the door and afterward the table.

Notwithstanding these helps to contentment, Mrs. Merryman carried a heavy heart under her silken attire. The words of the half-frozen wanderer kept up a refrain in her memory: "Archie is hungry and

tired and the snow is cold, but Archie won't wait."

Oh, to look about her in that comfortable home; the whole place glowing with light and heat, the kitchen redolent with roasting poultry; and she had refused the cup of coffee that might have kept hope and even life in the stranger!

"I do not deserve to have a roof over my head!" she said to herself as bitter tears welled to her eyes, but she controlled her feelings, for the halting of sleighs at the gate gave token that the bridal party had arrived.

Amid the chattering of merry voices her depression was unnoticed and the guests passed up to their rooms. Friends invited to meet them were coming in couples and groups, and she welcomed all smilingly, but her thoughts were upon the old and poorly clad man whom she had turned from her door.

At the moment of the arrival of the bridal party, Hilda Brinsfield, in the cottage of Jerusha Flint, was kneeling upon a chair by the western window; not watching with childlike interest the passing

sleighs with their joyous jingling of bells, but with a look of interest and hope upon her pale face to which for many a day it had been a stranger.

"Hilda," said Miss Flint, "I am going up to the village on business, and wish you to be quiet and patient. I will not be long away."

Hilda made no reply. She was thinking of a picture she had seen at Dr. Lattinger's where she had been the day before with Miss Flint.

It represented a group of sweet-faced angels, robed in white, grouped about a harp upon which one of their number was playing an accompaniment to their singing.

She had asked the nurse where the angels lived, and was told that their home was in heaven.

"Where is heaven?" she had asked eagerly.

"Do you see that sun?" asked the nurse, pointing to it from the window of the nursery. "That sun is in heaven."

Hilda had thought of but little else since hearing this. She had at last located the home where her parents and her Aunt Ashley awaited her. All that was required of her was to follow the sun and it

would lead her to them. She had watched all day, but the sun had kept itself hidden under dim clouds.

About the time that Miss Flint left the cottage it gleamed forth, and seemed to invite her to follow. A longing to be with father, mother and Aunt Ashley in heaven was too great to be resisted; all was to be gained by following where he led. Without stopping for wraps, the eager child hurried out. The sun, low in the west, seemed very near to her, and she ran to join it on its way. On and on she ran, the snow not crushing under her rapid tread. The air chilled her, but keeping the sun as a guide she pressed on. It sank below the horizon, but Hilda followed, guided by the ruddy glow which marked the spot where it descended. It grew dark and the child became bewildered, retracing her steps or wandering in a circle. Her limbs ached with weariness, and she was about to lie down and rest, when she heard the chatter of happy voices and the sound of sleigh bells, and, encouraged, she followed. But the sound ceased, and again she wandered aimlessly, having nothing to guide her.

At length she saw the gleaming of many lights, and she crept toward them.

"That is heaven!" she said to herself. "It is not far away, but I am so cold, so cold!"

The lights grew more brilliant, but she could scarcely move on toward them. Her thoughts grew confused, strange visions thronged her mind, vivid colors danced before her eyes, sweet music charmed her senses. She was growing less weary; a pleasant warmth comforted her, and her eyelids were heavy with sleep as she toiled on toward the goal, reached it, and sank down between an evergreen shrub and one of the windows of the Merryman farmhouse.

Unconscious of the tragedy transpiring without, the bride, arrayed in a fleecy robe of white, as were her attendants grouped about the piano, was singing, when at the window appeared the wanderer for the second time that evening, bearing in his arms the unconscious form of the little girl.

"She is dead," he murmured in a dazed, helpless way, as he stepped through the window which Mr. Merryman opened for him; "she was in the cold snow!"

"She may be," said Dr. Lattinger, coming quickly toward them. "We must take her to a cool room and make efforts to restore her."

Tear-dimmed eyes gazed upon the pallid face, loving arms were extended to bear her where Mrs. Merryman would direct, when Diana Strong, hearing the subdued exclamations of surprise and pity, came to the parlor door and glanced in.

"It is Hilda!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands and turning pale with emotion. "What could have driven her out this wintry night?"

Although a new anxiety had come to Mrs. Merryman, she experienced relief in again seeing the wanderer, and while Dr. and Mrs. Lattinger, Mrs. Courtney and Diana were doing all in their power to restore the little girl, she took him to the kitchen and soothed her tried conscience by seeing that he was made comfortable with light and warmth and good food at the table with Perry.

"I knows him," remarked Mose, who with Kitty was enjoying his supper at a table in another corner of the kitchen. "I done seen him many a time on the road."

"You knows a heap of people, Mose, that don't knows you," commented his grandmother.

"Where was the little girl when you found her?" Mrs. Merryman asked Archie, while Diana was pouring his coffee.

"She was sitting among the bushes by the piazza. Archie thought she was looking in at the people. Archie did not know she was dead until he took her up."

"Why were you here?" asked Mrs. Merryman kindly. "I thought you had left."

"Archie was cold and hungry and tired. He went to the barn to sleep; he had no other place to go. Archie heard sleigh bells and people coming in with horses, and was afraid they would drive him away. Archie walked about to keep warm; he heard singing and came to look in the window and found the little girl."

The efforts of Dr. Lattinger were rewarded; after a time Hilda had recovered sufficiently to be taken to the nursery where Diana watched beside her until time to help serve refreshments.

"Where is mamma?" whispered Hilda without

opening her weary eyes. "I heard the sweet music and saw the beautiful angels, but did not know my mamma or Aunt Ashley."

"You will see them after a time," said Diana tenderly; "go to sleep now and get rested."

"I will," whispered the little girl; "I am tired, so tired, but I have found heaven."

Tears flowed from Diana's eyes as she watched her sleeping, and tender-hearted Norah wept in sympathy.

Hilda was so changed; she seemed no longer the light-hearted, care-free, high-spirited child which had been loved and cherished by Mrs. Ashley. Sadness had its place upon the wan face, the pinched features, in the deep-sunken eyes. Diana almost censured herself for a share in the cause.

Fortunately Diana could remain at the farmhouse while the bridal company stayed, and her heart was comforted by knowing that Hilda had found a good home; for the next morning Mrs. Merryman received a note from Miss Flint saying that as Hilda had run away from the cottage, she should not be received again under that roof.

The same afternoon as Perry was returning from the village with a wagon, Miss Jerusha stopped him at her gate and helped him place in it three trunks which had belonged to Mrs. Ashley. They contained clothing, books and bric-a-brac, Jerusha retaining the furniture until claimed by Mrs. Warfield.

Cast upon the charity of Mr. and Mrs. Merryman, Hilda was heartily accepted, and Miss Flint went from her cottage in the morning and returned to it in the evening, rejoicing that she was at last free from the burden that had oppressed her. So sprightly did she become, in addition to her naturally independent and arbitrary manner that she gave no one reason to suspect that her conscience was troubled by three secrets, one of which in after years she strove vainly to divulge to Hilda.

The bridal company had been entertained at the Courtneys, the Lattingers and several other homes, had seen the places of interest in the neighborhood, had heard the traditions and chronicles, especially that of the spectre that haunted "My Lady's Manor" and had returned to their homes.

One evening Norah was preparing the evening meal and crooning an Irish melody—to which Hilda, sitting in Erma's cradle, was listening attentively—and had just placed tea biscuits in the oven when the door opened and Archie came in.

He was comfortably clothed in the suit given him by Mr. Merryman, and without glancing at Norah or Hilda he went directly to the seat in the corner of the hearth which he had occupied the night of the reception.

"It is Archie!" cried Hilda in delight, "he has brought me a mocking bird."

"No, Archie is ashamed that he could not bring one," said the wanderer sadly. "He has tried and tried to catch one, but Archie has brought something," and untying a plaid handkerchief he gave her a dead oriole, a bit of moss, several snail and mussel shells, and other trifles which he had gathered in the woods and streams perhaps miles away.

When Mr. and Mrs. Merryman and their little Erma returned from Dorton and with Hilda sat down to tea in the dining-room, Archie fell asleep in his chair, but awoke to take supper with Norah

and Perry; then went to the room over the kitchen which he had previously occupied, and before the sun rose was away upon his aimless wanderings.

Thus the years passed, and in the home of the Merrymans contentment and peace reigned. Hilda was looked upon as the elder daughter of the house and was treated as kindly as though indeed their own. She went daily to the village school and was beloved by teachers and companions.

Although each school day she passed the cottage twice, and the same on Sabbaths to the village church, she never had a glimpse of Jerusha Flint, from which the inference could be rightly drawn that Jerusha had frequent glimpses of her.

One Saturday morning Hilda was helping Mrs. Merryman arrange the potted plants upon the porch when Mose, hat in hand, made his appearance with a note from Mrs. Courtney inviting them to take tea at "Friedenheim" that evening.

Hilda's eager glance at Mrs. Merryman, hoping for acceptance of the invitation, was met by an assenting smile; a reply was written and Mose hurried away.

When it came time to dress for the visit Norah, who took great pride in Hilda's beauty, arranged her hair in soft, full ringlets and helped her don a pretty pink gown, Hilda's favorite, and singularly becoming.

The visit was one of unalloyed pleasure, for during the afternoon Mr. Valentine Courtney drove out from the city in a handsome carriage drawn by a pair of ponies, and finding Hilda and Erma there took them out for a drive, and after tea he took them the short walk to "My Lady's Manor," too short to Mr. Courtney, so interested and amused was he with the conversation of Hilda.

He enjoyed her quaint manner of telling the events which transpired within the range of her knowledge, among them the arrival of Norah's aunt from Scotland, an event of great interest to Norah, and through her to Hilda.

"She is now at your Uncle Merryman's, I suppose?" remarked Mr. Courtney, with a view to keeping up his share of the conversation.

"No, she is in Baltimore, but she wants to come to Dorton to be near Norah; and Aunt Merryman

will try to get her a place as housekeeper. She is a very good housekeeper," concluded Hilda sagely.

When they reached "My Lady's Manor," Mr. Courtney unlocked the front door, and they passed in; and after closing it he led the way through the wide hall to the rooms on either side, all seeming to Hilda like the almost forgotten remembrance of a dream. Then they ascended to the second floor, then to the third and from thence up the narrow stair-way to the walk on the roof, where Mr. Courtney pointed out the prominent places in the city and noted the changes in Hilda's expressive countenance, as in her quaint manner she gave her views of them.

It was growing twilight and so they turned to descend, Hilda being the first to reach the stair-way.

"There is a lady waiting to come up!" she said in a half whisper, "I think she is very old."

"A lady?" ejaculated Mr. Courtney, in surprise, and, stepping to the stair-way, he glanced down.

The little lady in black, of whom he had so often heard, stood at the foot, with bowed head and

folded hands, but before Mr. Courtney could address her, she disappeared.

When they descended to the attic, Mr. Courtney, without commenting upon the subject, glanced into the rooms, but not a living creature was to be seen, nor in the rooms below it; the house was silent save for their footfalls.

"This mystery shall be explained, if possible, and that at the earliest moment," he said to himself as he locked the hall door upon their exit, and if Hilda noticed that he was silent on their walk back to "Friedenheim" she made no comment.

Mr. Courtney joined the Rev. Carl, Mrs. Courtney and Mrs. Merryman upon the piazza, while Hilda and Erma, attracted by the cheerful appearance of the kitchen, halted at the door.

"Come right in, honey," cried Uncle Andy, heartily. "We is mighty glad to see yer; we has no little chillen no mo', an' 'pears like we can nebber git used ter doin' widout 'em."

"Where have they gone?" asked Hilda as, holding Erma's hand, she stepped in.

"Roy an' Cecil has done mos' growed up, an' de

little gal hab gone to heaven whar ol' Andy will go in de heavenly Master's own good time. Ol' Andy will soon go, honey."

Hilda longed to send a message by him to her father and mother and her Uncle and Aunt Ashley, but had not courage to go near enough to him to whisper her request. Her indecision brought the delicate bloom to her cheek, which always appeared under any little excitement, and which awakened anew the admiration of Chloe.

"She is as pretty as a picture; that is just the truth," she remarked to Kitty.

"Now, Chloe, jes' yer hab done wid dat," exclaimed Andy, turning sharply about. "Ol' Satan an' de lookin' glass will done tell her dat fas' enough widout yore help."

"They will tell her the truth, Uncle Andy, you know that your own self," replied Chloe nonchalantly.

"Purty is as purty does, honey; don't disremember dat," advised Andy, turning to Hilda; "don't let nobody make you sassy of yer beauty, fer bimebye, if de good Lord spares yer dat long, de wrin-

kles will done scare de beauty away. Den whar is yer?"

"Never scared no beauty away from Mis' Emma," asserted Chloe defiantly. "Wrinkles is coming to stay, but she is a beauty in spite of them."

"'Kase mistess wan't sassy cb her beauty, dat's what I done jes' say, Chloe; de strongholt is mine, not yourn," and Andy laughed and coughed exultantly.

"Missus come of a pretty family," interposed Kitty. "She couldn't have been ugly if she had tried. When she an' Mars Courtney was bride and groom, dey was de han'somest couple in de state, an' her mother an' grandmother were beauties in der day."

"'Kase dey was Christians, an' had der treasures laid up in heaven. Yes, Kitty, dey was good to de pore an' 'flicted, and too busy helpin' dem dat could not help demselves to be sassy about der beauty."

"They was too good for dis yer world, dat's certain," responded Kitty.

"Deed was dey, an' nebber done forgit dar manners to nobody. When I was de coachman, and

used ter bring Selim to de block for young mistus —dat was dis Misus Courtney's grandmother— honey," he said, turning to Hilda, "an' she done come sweepin' down de piazzy steps, holdin' de long train ob her habit ober her arm, an' her pearl handled whip in her han', an' de long plumes in her hat bowin' an' noddin', tell yer what, honey, she suttenly was purtier dan any picture."

"So she was," echoed Kitty. "I was young then, but I remember that she looked like Mis' Emma."

"But you done forget about the manners, Uncle Andy," said Chloe flippantly.

"Oh, yes! When I done led Selim to de block an' would pat de proud-sperited creetur 'till mistus mounted into de saddle, an' took the bridle, an' was startin' away, she allus said, 'Thanky, Andy!' She nebber disremembered dat, nebber."

"Yes, and Mis' Emma is just as polite as her mother and grandmother," said Kitty, proudly, "they was born ladies and couldn't be anything else."

It came time for Mrs. Merryman to go. Hilda and Erma were summoned. Mrs. Courtney and

her brother Valentine accompanied them across the meadow to their home, and their conversation on the return walk was of "My Lady's Manor," now bathed in the splendor of the moonlight.

CHAPTER VII

HILDA'S WELCOME TO MY LADY'S MANOR

A week passed and one evening Mr. Courtney came out on the train to remain over night at "Friedenheim," and with him were Ralph and James Rivers.

He had something in contemplation which he wished to impart to the Rev. Carl and Mrs. Courtney, and when supper was finished and they returned to the library he mentioned what he thought they might consider a foolish experiment.

"Brother Carl and Sister Emma, I am thinking of housekeeping. What is your opinion of it?" he asked.

"Do you mean at 'My Lady's Manor'?" asked Mrs. Courtney. "I think it would be charming thus having you for a neighbor; it would be next best to having you at 'Friedenheim'."

"I, too, am pleased," said Rev. Carl. "Are you really in earnest?"

"Yes, I would like to at least make the trial, if I can get a suitable housekeeper."

"But the apparition, Val!" reminded Rev. Carl in a low tone. "Of course we give no credence to such foolishness, but you may have trouble in getting a housekeeper."

"I would never have taken Anna there until the mystery was explained, neither would I be willing to have anyone run the chance of being frightened, but Ralph and James have a plan in view which I will not disappoint them by divulging. In the meantime Hilda mentioned that Mrs. Merryman knows of a woman who wishes to come to Dorton; did she happen to mention it to you, Sister Emma?"

"Yes, she asked me if I knew of anyone who needs a housekeeper. It is Nora's aunt who wishes a place. She is now at a friend's house in the city."

"I wish you would see Mrs. Merryman in regard to it when convenient."

"I will go or send there to-morrow, and am sure that Mrs. Merryman will act promptly in regard to securing her."

About twilight Ralph and James, with traveling

satchels in hand, walked to "My Lady's Manor" with the intention of discovering, if possible, what manner of creature it was that was deceiving so many people.

The satchel of James held a lamp, candles and matches, and Ralph's contained a stiff rope with a noose at one end, with which he purposed capturing the spectre.

They took a survey of the mansion and decided upon occupying the two bed-rooms overlooking the quarters.

The doors of both rooms opened into the corridor, and these they decided to lock, that any unquiet spirit that chose to visit one of the rooms could have free access only to the other.

Not a sound disturbed the stillness of the night; they slept peacefully until the white sails upon the Patapsco were tinged with rosy hues of the ascending sun.

Before returning to "Friedenheim" they explored the attic room, which was void of furniture or articles of any kind, but found no clue to the mystery, nor hiding place for even a mouse.

As the spectre declined to visit them when the doors leading to the corridor were locked, the next night they decided to leave the door ajar which led into it from the bed-room which Mrs. Farnsworth and Anna had used as a library, and to place a lighted lamp near the steps leading to the attic rooms. Ralph, with rope behind him, lay down upon the lounge in that room and James occupied the room adjoining.

He was too excited to sleep, but Ralph was in the land of dreams when something like an icy hand touched his forehead. He sprang up, rope in hand, and followed the little lady in black who had glided through the door and ascended several steps toward the attic room, threw the noose about her neck and brought her to a halt so suddenly that she had to cling to the banister to keep from falling. A piece of marble which had simulated the cold hand fell to the floor, the lace cap and gray curls fell back, disclosing a head of glossy black hair, and the dough mask fell off, showing the humiliated face of Jerusha Flint.

The boys stood appalled at the discovery, and

Jerusha shed a torrent of tears, but whether from shame or grief or anger they had no means of knowing.

She spoke no word, but like a veritable spectre, glided up the attic stairs and was seen no more. Only the sound of the shutting of a distant door in some part of the large building could be faintly heard, then the boys locked the three doors and slept in the bed-room until morning.

It is doubtful if any news could have given more genuine astonishment to the home circle at "Friedenheim" than that of Miss Flint playing the rôle of a spectre, and the motive that prompted her was quite as much of a mystery. But before the day closed the matter was made plain by Miss Jerusha, who sent a humble message to Mrs. Courtney to come to see her, as she desired earnestly to converse with her and was too ill to leave her cottage.

Mrs. Courtney went immediately, and although Miss Jerusha expected her, she could scarcely raise her eyes to her neighbor's face when she stood beside her, so humiliated was she as she lay pale, yet feverish, upon the lounge.

"I don't know what you can think of me, Mrs. Courtney," she said, as she signified her wish for her visitor to take the seat beside her, "but I will tell you the exact truth."

Mrs. Courtney took the chair in silence and Miss Flint, after a pause, resumed.

"Anna Ashburton was my friend, the only person in her position who treated me as an equal, and because she had given me her friendship, I told her what I have told no other, before or since. She understood me as no other human being could; she pitied me and loved me; and if I could have remained with her I would not be the desolate, unhappy, malicious creature I am. It was a bitter blow to us when we were cast out of that beautiful home. We both loved it, and I say in all sincerity that I grieved more for her sake than for my own. I had not her gentle spirit, having inherited a proud and implacable temper, and I vowed in my homeless condition that so far as lay in my power to prevent it, Reginald Farnsworth should never find purchaser or tenant for his ill-gotten property."

"But my dear Miss Flint," said Mrs. Courtney,

'My Lady's Manor' has not belonged to Mr. Farnsworth for several years. He gave it back to Anna Ashburton and she bequeathed it to my brother, Valentine Courtney."

"Bequeathed it to your brother!" echoed Miss Jerusha slowly, and turning very pale. "She had it to bequeath, yet never told me of it in any of the kind, affectionate letters she wrote to me?"

"She did not become owner of the property until a short time before her death. She was coming to see all her Maryland friends and was keeping it as a surprise."

"She left her property to a man who has already more wealth than he can use, and not one penny to me whom she promised to give a home if she ever had one to share with me! God help me! I thought I had one friend, but there is no such a thing in the wide world. My life has been a miserable failure."

"You should not censure Anna Ashburton, Miss Flint. I feel sure it was her intention to keep her promise to you."

A scornful smile crossed the thin lips of Jerusha, but she made no response.

"And you should not count your life a failure, there is no one in the neighborhood more useful!"

A sniff of derision rewarded this sincere compliment.

"Please tell me," resumed Mrs. Courtney, "how you could act the part of a spectre and not frighten the servants away."

"Nothing could be simpler," replied Miss Jerusha wearily. "They were glad of anything that would dishearten Mr. Farnsworth and cause him to restore Anna's property to her. They never saw me, because nothing would tempt them to enter the main building except in daytime, and then not alone."

"You always disappeared in the unfurnished attic room, yet James and Ralph, who examined it thoroughly, could find no place of exit."

"That was yet simpler when understood. In that one short, happy summer with Anna I was one afternoon gathering clusters of grapes from the arbor which yet shades this end of the house, and noticed a locked door for which I could see no use.

I spoke of it to Anna and she explained that it led by flights of narrow steps to a room just their width, off the back attic, and furnished with rows of hooks for meat. After the building of a meat house it was abandoned and almost forgotten.

"When we were forced to leave 'My Lady's Manor' my plans were laid. There was no key to that door, but my brother, being a locksmith, had keys of every shape and size. I took the impression of the keyhole in wax and never gave up trying keys until I got one that would turn the rusty lock. Then, screened by the arbor, I could gain admittance any hour of the day or night."

"But how could you get from the meat room to other parts of the house?"

"There is a sliding door in the partition which allowed the servants of that day to get meat from the room without unlocking the outer door. It fitted so perfectly that no one could detect it except by the knob, which I took care should be removed; and it would not occur to anyone that there was a narrow room between it and the outer weather-boarding of the house."

"But the costume of Mrs. Joshua Farnsworth?"

"Anna gave it to me as a memento of her foster mother. I kept it on one of the hooks, and it was short work to don it. The meat room having no window, the light from my shaded lamp could not be seen from the outside. Here is the key. You can give it, with my compliments, to Mr. Courtney;" and again the scornful smile passed over her lips.

Mrs. Courtney saw in this a hint of dismissal and arose to go; moreover Miss Flint appeared weak and exhausted.

"But can I do nothing for you?" she asked. "It grieves me to leave you so alone."

"When I need assistance from you or anyone in Dorton, or out of it, I will ask it," replied Jerusha haughtily, her black eyes gleaming with unshed tears, and, seeing that her presence was no longer desired, Mrs. Courtney went home.

When she reached there she found a note from Mrs. Merryman saying that Mrs. Flynn was ready any day to assume the duties of housekeeper at "My Lady's Manor," and Mr. Courtney was en-

couraged to proceed with his arrangements for housekeeping.

Busy days now followed, for Mrs. Courtney resolved that her brother's home should be in perfect order for his reception on his return from the city the first evening of taking possession of his inheritance, and all the Courtney family be there to welcome him.

At length all was in readiness and not only the parlor but the kitchen at "Friedenheim" was interested, for Chloe was to depart to take up her abode as cook at "My Lady's Manor," and the evening of the home-coming was sent over by Mrs. Courtney to have all in readiness for the supper which she and Kitty had prepared, and would be brought later by Mose.

Chloe never felt her importance more than when, as sole occupant of "My Lady's Manor," she unlocked the china closet and took out the beautiful and costly ware, once the property of Mrs. Joshua Farnsworth. She was absorbed in admiration of a tea plate, almost transparent when held between her and the light, when the door quietly opened and

Archie came in, and without so much as a glance at the startled Chloe made his way to the corner of the broad hearth.

"Archie was glad when he saw the smoke coming again from the chimney. Archie has often looked for it," he said, rubbing his hands in satisfaction at seeing the glow from the open grate of the range.

"Nobody comes into my kitchen without knockin'. Don't like folks to come in that way nohow," remarked Chloe, keeping at a respectful distance.

"Archie never knocks. All the houses he goes to are Archie's homes."

"This is Marse Courtney's house and I am boss of this kitchen," proclaimed Chloe.

"Archie is tired. He has walked and walked," and before Chloe could make further protest he had leaned back and closed his eyes in the comfortable chair.

She kept on with her work, but it was with a feeling of relief that she saw the carriage with Mrs. Courtney and Cecil stop at the gate.

Hilda on her way from the village school had stopped to speak to them, and Mrs. Courtney, ever

mindful of the pleasure of others, invited her to assist in welcoming Mr. Courtney.

The delicate flush which always visited the cheek of Hilda at an unexpected pleasure proved her eagerness to accept, and she followed Mrs. Courtney up the broad walk to the entrance.

"I am afraid I ought not to stay. Aunt Grace will worry about me," she said, as Chloe, in new plaid turban, opened the door, beaming with satisfaction.

"I have thought of that, dear, and intend Cecil to drive over and tell Mrs. Merryman that you are here."

"Oh, please let me go with him!" said Hilda eagerly; "I will put on my pink cashmere dress and ask Norah to curl my hair."

"Certainly, my dear, if you wish it, but you look very neat to have been in school all day."

With happiness heightening the beauty of her expressive face, Hilda turned to go.

"Tell Mrs. Merryman not to be anxious about your coming home this evening," enjoined Mrs. Courtney; "we will take you in the carriage."

"Come in and see the table before you go, honey," said Chloe, leading the way to the supper room and watching for Hilda's admiring glance when the table came in view.

"Oh, Chloe, it is splendid!" she said in delight. "I never saw china and glass glisten so."

"Yes, honey, it do glisten, and so do the silver. Jes' you wait till the lamps are lighted and you see that table with the fried chicken and oysters and pounded biscuit and muffins and raspberry jam. Be sure and hurry back, honey! Come as soon as ever you can!"

As eager to be among all these triumphs as was Chloe to have her, Hilda promised, when a new thought came to her.

"Chloe, will there be little bouquets at the plates and a large one in the center of the table as Mrs. Courtney likes to have at home?"

"I 'spect so, honey. Mis' Emma allus sees to the flowers. There's oceans of 'em growin' wild in the yards and garden."

"Oh, Chloe, I have the loveliest pink rosebuds

at home. I will bring them to put at Mr. Valentine's plate."

"Where did you get them, honey?"

"The miller's wife gave the bush to me. She asked Miss Jerusha Flint for it, because it had been planted by Aunt Ashley. And Miss Jerusha gave it, although she knew it was for me. I knew nothing of it until I came one evening from school and found it in my flower bed. It was very kind of them."

"I 'spect, honey, Miss Flint don't care for flowers, or you wouldn't have it now."

Hilda smiled and was hurrying away when she caught sight of Chloe's first guest.

"Why, there is Archie!" she cried, "dear, dear Archie!" and running to him, she took his hand in her soft little palms.

"Does you know him, honey?" asked Chloe, full of surprise.

"Know him? Oh, Chloe, he saved my life!"

"Yes, honey, I done heard that some old body found you in the snow. Mighty fine girl he saved; he ought to be proud of that find."

"Archie is proud," said the old man who had waked at the first sound of Hilda's voice. "Archie looks all the time for people in the snow since he found her."

By this time Cecil, who had finished bringing in the baskets, was waiting for her. She ran out, stepped into the carriage and was driven away.

"I hope we won't meet any boys," thought Cecil. "They would never stop plaguing me."

Mrs. Merryman was glad that Hilda had the prospect of this pleasant visit and entertained Cecil while she ran up to her room to dress, keeping in remembrance the roses she was to take.

"I am so glad you will be there, Miss Hilda," said Norah joyously as she curled the girl's beautiful hair. "I am to go as soon as our supper is over, and will stay all night with aunt, for Mrs. Merryman, bless her kind heart, says that aunt will feel strange and lonely at first."

"I am glad you are coming, Norah; I am sure your aunt will be glad to have you."

Looking very fair and sweet in her becoming toilet and with rosebuds in hand, Hilda reached

"My Lady's Manor" and was assisted from the carriage by Mr. Valentine Courtney, who was watching for her.

"My little Hilda expected to welcome me. Instead I welcome, gladly welcome her to my home," and, taking her hand in his, they went up the broad path to the entrance.

"Thank you, sir," smiled Hilda. "When I went past here to school this morning I never thought of being here this evening."

"I hope it is as much pleasure to you to be here as it is to me to welcome you," he said kindly.

"Yes, I love to be here. I think 'My Lady's Manor' the loveliest place in the world."

"Then I hope you will come very often," he returned smiling with pleasure. "You are fond of reading, I am sure."

"Oh, yes, I do love a pretty book; I am reading a beautiful story now."

"Here is a large collection and suitable for every age," said Mr. Courtney as they reached the library, which since the days of Mr. Reginald Farnsworth was on the first floor, across the hall from the par-

lor—"you can read here when it suits you, or you can take any books home with you that you wish."

The glad light in Hilda's eyes and the flush upon her cheek showed her appreciation of the offer, for which she thanked him in her naturally graceful manner.

It was one of the happiest hours of Mr. Courtney's life when, in company with his sister, her husband and sons and Hilda, they sat at supper in his own home for the first time.

Mrs. Courtney did the honors, and Roy and Cecil, though accustomed to Kitty's and Chloe's culinary achievements all their lives, considered the supper the best they ever tasted.

Twilight came and the whistle of a departing train had scarcely died upon the air, when Norah, who had gone to the Dorton Station, was seen coming with her aunt. Hilda ran to the gate to meet them, and Mrs. Courtney received Mrs. Flynn kindly, introduced her to her employer, and asked Norah to take her to her room while Chloe prepared her supper.

Mrs. Courtney admired the neat-looking woman

with the stamp of goodness in her face and felt satisfied that she was a suitable person to manage her brother's household.

Hilda had never enjoyed an evening so thoroughly, as she flitted like a bird through the spacious rooms. She was now in the parlor listening to the cheerful conversation, now in the tea room with Mrs. Flynn and Norah, then in the kitchen where Chloe was putting all in order for the night, and Archie was resting in his chair.

"What's to be done about him, honey?" asked Chloe in a whisper, nodding her gay turban toward the sleeper. "He's gwine to stay all night, that's certain; I knowed that as soon as he was done supper, 'cause he never sighted his ol' hat and cane in the corner, but made straight back to his chair."

"Will I ask Mrs. Courtney, Chloe?" whispered Hilda.

"Ax Marse Val, honey, 'cause the house is his'n now."

Hilda returned to the parlor and stood beside Mr. Valentine Courtney until he finished something he was saying to Rev. Carl.

"Chloe wishes to know if Archie is to stay over night," she said somewhat anxiously; "he does not say anything about going away."

"Certainly he can stay," replied Mr. Courtney. "Please tell Chloe to see that he has a comfortable bed," and Hilda sped away, well pleased with her mission.

"It would be a poor beginning to my housekeeping to turn a fellow pilgrim away, would it not?" he asked, with a smile, of Rev. Carl.

"I think so, indeed. You are doing right to invite him to stay and to make him comfortable."

"Before we leave you perhaps it would be advisable for me to go through the rooms in the back building and see which would be best to give him," suggested Mrs. Courtney.

Before Mr. Valentine could reply Hilda came running back to the parlor. "He has gone to his room without waiting for anybody to tell him," she said almost breathlessly. "He says he knows the room that Lois gave him."

Rev. Carl gave a hearty peal of laughter, in which all joined. "That is the style of visitors to

have, brother Val," he said; "they save you the trouble of entertaining them."

"I look upon it as a good omen," smiled his brother-in-law. "I hope my home will be a place of rest and refreshment to all who enter its doors."

"I am sure it will be," said Mrs. Courtney sincerely; "but this Archie, I don't understand his saying that he knows the room that Lois gave him. I am quite sure it was not in Mr. Joshua Farnsworth's time, or in that of his widow, or Anna. I was here quite often, and never saw him or heard any of them speak of him."

"The servants who had charge afterward may have allowed him to sleep here, and no doubt were glad to have company near them," suggested Rev. Carl.

"While we were reviving Hilda the night that Archie found her in the snow, Diana Strong mentioned that she had seen him on the road more than once, but did not know his name," remarked Mrs. Courtney.

"I, too, remember hearing him spoken of that evening," rejoined Rev. Carl. "Dr. Lattinger men-

tioned that he frequently met him, and said that he was a mystery to him, reminding him of the Wandering Jew. He added that Archie is weak-minded and does not know his last name."

"He appears to be one who has seen better times," commented Mrs. Courtney. "There is an air of refinement about him that one does not see in the ordinary wayfarer. I believe that he has a history, but it is not likely that we will ever know it."

It was now time to return to "Friedenheim," and Mrs. Courtney arose to go.

"I hope, sister, that you will allow Roy and Cecil to come here frequently and pass the night with me. I will bring Ralph and James often, and wish all these young people and their friends to take pleasure in visiting here."

"They will not be more pleased to come than I will be to have them with you, and we all wish you every happiness in your home," replied his sister affectionately. And thus ended the happy day that welcomed Hilda Brinsfield for the second period of her life to "My Lady's Manor."

CHAPTER VIII

LETTERS WHICH BRING A TRIAL TO HILDA

Not only the village of Dorton, but the whole country around it rejoiced that Mr. Valentine Courtney was the owner of "My Lady's Manor," and that it was again occupied and one of the hospitable homes of the neighborhood.

His first purchase was a pair of handsome horses, a comfortable carriage and a phaeton.

For coachman he wished a middle-aged, unmarried man, for whom he advertised, and among the many who responded was one he was satisfied to engage. This man was Sandy MacQuoid, a Scotchman who bore testimonials from two Edinburgh families as to his exemplary character and capability.

Sandy was tall, thin and pale, quiet in manner

and scrupulously neat in attire, which was always black and perfect in fit.

With congratulations of his own good fortune, Mr. Courtney brought him to "My Lady's Manor" and the years which followed proved Sandy's testimonials correct; he vied in fidelity with the Irish housekeeper and the African cook.

Sandy stipulated but for one favor after the matter of salary was agreed upon, and that was that he might bring a parrot, which had been trained to say many things, and his Scotch bagpipes.

Mr. Courtney granted both requests with pleasure for he was partial to pets and fond of music; moreover the place would be rendered more attractive to his nephews and their friends, and to Hilda.

With the cordial assent of Mrs. Merryman, Hilda had availed herself of the invitation of Mr. Courtney to read in his library, and almost every afternoon on her way from school she passed an hour or more in the home-like room.

Although Mrs. Flynn and Chloe saw but little of her during that hour, they were glad to know she was there; the day always seemed brighter when

she passed on the way to the library, halting to chat a moment with them.

As a rule, she was away by the time that Mr. Courtney returned from the city, but it was a pleasure to him to hear that she had been there.

At his request Mrs. Flynn frequently invited Hilda and her schoolmates to tea, which request was all the more heartily appreciated by her that Norah always came and spent the evening in order to see Hilda safely home.

It was also an understood thing that when Rev. Carl and Mrs. Courtney came to take tea at "My Lady's Manor" Hilda should be invited, and she always accepted the invitation. Thus in time she looked upon the villa as a second home, as when a child in the cottage of her Aunt Ashley she passed so much time there with Anna Ashburton.

Happy summers passed, and winters equally pleasant, and Hilda was growing into healthy, symmetrical and beautiful young womanhood, the cultivation of her fine mind keeping pace with her growth.

Three days in each week Mr. Courtney went to

the city in his carriage and Sandy, after leaving him at his office, purchased supplies for the household.

One day, after completing this, he was driving to the hotel where the horses were cared for, when he had the unexpected pleasure of meeting an old friend who had recently arrived from "the land of the thistle."

Sandy invited him to take luncheon with him, after which they repaired to the lodgings of his friend where he was presented with a young Scotch terrier of great intelligence.

Sandy's pleasure in the gift was enhanced by that of Mr. Courtney, and when Roy and Cecil came over that evening they could scarcely tear themselves away in time to study their next day's lessons, so charmed were they with the terrier.

The parrot was kept on the porch, as a rule, and in order to hear its quaint speeches one had to go there, but the terrier was here, there and everywhere; and Hilda was almost tempted at times to defer her reading in the library to be amused by the antics of the canine foreigner.

Seeing her fondness for the terrier, Chloe was

loth to complain of it, but could not at times refrain when his mischief grew too pronounced.

"That pup is mighty mischievous, honey," she said one afternoon upon recovering her breath after chasing the terrier to get her clean turban which he had captured. "You don't know the tricks that terrier can play. When the door-bell rings and I go to let company in, I'm never sartin that a pile of bones or ol' shoes won't fall in when I open the door."

"I wonder why he likes best to put them at the front door when there are so many doors to the house?" laughed Hilda.

"Jes' to be as tricky as ever he kin, honey, and where he finds the ol' shoes is the riddle I can't guess. I never sees none layin' around, and I burns all he fotches in."

"But he is so funny, Chloe, and we all love him so!"

"I'm not gwine to say nothin' agin him, honey, and haven't said nothin', even when he tore up my best turban that Mis' Emma done give me. Mrs. Flynn feeds him. She puts a piece of oilcloth on

the floor by the table and gives the terrier scraps while she and Mr. Sandy is eatin'."

One afternoon Mrs. Courtney, Mrs. Merryman and Hilda went to take tea at "My Lady's Manor," a charming walk across the fields that lovely day, and Hilda was the happiest of the happy.

The afternoon passed speedily and pleasantly, and Hilda, who had been part of the time in the library, was first to see the carriage containing Mr. Courtney and Sandy stop at the side gate. She ran joyously to announce his arrival to Mrs. Courtney, then to the kitchen to tell Chloe, then out to the gate to meet him.

"My home-coming is always more pleasant when Hilda is here to welcome me," he said cordially as he clasped her dimpled hand; "something told me that you would meet me at the gate."

Hilda flushed with pleasure, and, clinging to his hand, she went with him to the parlor, where he welcomed the other guests, then went to his dressing room, the terrier flying up the steps in advance of him, and watching every movement with alert, bright eyes until he descended.

Hilda's request to arrange the bouquet for the center of the table was cheerfully granted by Mrs. Flynn, and with scissors in hand she went to the garden, the terrier following in an ecstasy of delight and playing about her until he saw Archie coming through the gate, his coat upon his arm, for the evening was warm.

The terrier ran to meet him, danced around him and barked, but Archie paid no attention to him, and walking slowly up he placed his coat on the balustrade of the back porch, then went to his favorite seat in the kitchen, and was soon asleep, worn out with his constant walking.

Hilda, in the meantime, had arranged her roses in a tall vase and placed them upon the table; then the tea-bell rang and Mr. Courtney and his guests gathered about it, and cheerful conversation enlivened the meal.

When it was finished they went to the library, where later, Sandy, tall, grave and reserved, joined them at Mr. Courtney's request to give them Scotch airs upon the bagpipes.

It seemed to Hilda, seated near Mr. Courtney,

that Sandy's music never sounded so mournfully sweet as upon that evening, the last time she was to hear it for many days. For destiny was quietly closing the doors of "My Lady's Manor" upon her, and opening those of a distant farmhouse, the existence of which she had never known.

In the pauses of the music the occupants of the library heard a scampering and a scuffling upon the porch, mingled with sharp, quick barks, and the dragging of something to and fro.

Mr. Courtney arose and was about to pass from the room to see what occasioned the sounds, when through the open door rushed the terrier, bearing in his mouth two letters which he dropped upon the floor and then ran out.

"Can't find no mo' ol' shoes so must go and tear up the coat that Marse Archie sot so much store by," said Chloe, as she captured both coat and the terrier as he was again scampering into the library. "I done heerd that scampering and knowed that tarrier was up to sumpin', and he's done tore out the linin' of that good coat and the cover off a letter."

"Did he get the letters out of the coat?" asked

Mr. Courtney, as Hilda picked them from the floor.

"I 'spect so, sir. There weren't no letters on the piazzy 'till the tarrier done tore the coat."

"This one is signed 'Janette Ashley'," said Hilda, becoming very pale, "and is addressed to 'My Dear Sister Sarah.' I remember that Aunt Ashley's first name was Janette," she added, turning to Mrs. Merryman and putting the letter in her hand.

"It was, Hilda, and her sister's name was Sarah Warfield. Shall I read it aloud?"

The girl nodded; she could not trust her voice to speak.

"These must be the letters of which Diana Strong spoke the evening of my reception," remarked Mrs. Merryman when she finished reading. "The dates prove that they were written the week of Mrs. Ashley's death."

"My husband wrote this one," said Mrs. Courtney, to whom Mrs. Merryman had passed the letters. "I recognize the writing; besides, I remember hearing him say at the time that he had written a letter for Mrs. Ashley to her sister in Ohio. He wrote it at the cottage and I remember his saying

that Mrs. Ashley asked Diana to give him her pen from the writing desk. He said it was the handsomest he had ever seen, a gold pen, the handle also gold, and set with lines of rubies. He commented upon the beauty of it, and Mrs. Ashley said her father gave it to her upon her fifteenth birthday, and she had never used any other since."

"But where have the letters been all this time?" said Mrs. Merryman.

"Without doubt in the pocket of the coat of which the terrier has torn the lining," said Mr. Courtney, whose handsome face had grown pale and sad since the reading of the letters.

"Poor Mrs. Warfield never received them and we have censured her for not replying," continued Mrs. Merryman.

"But one would suppose that not receiving any letter from her sister, she would write to know the reason for her silence," suggested Mr. Courtney.

"She may have done so, but I never heard of it. Diana said that she asked the postmaster to forward a newspaper containing a notice of Mrs. Ashley's death."

"What should be done with the letters?" asked Mrs. Courtney. "Ought they not be forwarded to Mrs. Warfield?"

Hilda sat pale and silent, glancing anxiously from one to another, and for a time no one spoke.

"It appears to be the just, therefore the right thing, to do," commented Mrs. Merryman.

"As my husband wrote one of the letters, if you all agree to it, I will take them home and ask him to forward them to Mrs. Warfield. Wouldn't that be best, my love?" asked Mrs. Courtney, turning to Hilda.

"Oh, she may think I ought to go to her! How can I leave you all?" exclaimed the girl.

Tears filled the eyes of the elder ladies, and Mr. Courtney arose and left the room.

"But we would not be acting justly to the living or the dead by withholding them," interposed Mrs. Courtney.

"No, it would not be right, they must be sent," sobbed Hilda.

"The question with me is, how letters written so long ago came to be in Archie's coat," said Mrs.

Merryman. "I know that he is, in his sad, preoccupied way, searching for something in his pitiable wanderings, and has his pockets at times filled with trifles, but these letters, while somewhat stained and yellow, are not the least worn, so could not have been carried long in his pocket."

"It will always be a mystery, I think, unless he is willing to tell us where he found them."

"He was at our house over night," said Mrs. Merryman reflectively. "I wonder, if asked, whether he could tell where he got them. Will you ask him, Hilda?"

She obeyed immediately, but as they supposed, he could not give the least information.

"Diana incidentally mentioned that she gave the letters to Perry to mail. It may be that he is the one to blame for their not being received by Mrs. Warfield. I will ask him as soon as I get home," continued Mrs. Merryman.

"But what could be his object, and where has he kept them all these years without your knowledge?"

"I have not the least idea. He has a small trunk, but it is never locked, nor has he ever given the

least evidence that he is keeping anything hidden."

Hilda arose and left the library, and as she stepped into the hall she heard footsteps of someone passing to and fro upon the long piazza. It was Mr. Courtney, and as she appeared in the door-way he halted and held out his hand to her. She glided swiftly to him and he clasped her hand and placed it within his arm, and silently they walked back and forth.

The ladies prepared for their return home, and Mrs. Merryman went to apprise Hilda, who withdrew her hand to follow. For one brief moment Mr. Courtney clasped her in his arms, for one brief moment she sobbed upon his breast, then she rejoined the others. They bade the master of "My Lady's Manor" good-night at his gate and left him to his sad forebodings.

When Mrs. Merryman reached home she questioned Perry, whereupon he made a full confession, glad to be relieved of the secret which had so long oppressed him.

Diana Strong, during Mrs. Ashley's illness, had given him two letters to mail at the Dorton post-

office. He had opened them out of mere curiosity, as he earnestly alleged, and they had been a millstone about his neck. Terror of the law had made him afraid to have them found in his possession, and what conscience he had, refused to let him destroy them. He had taken them to the woods and placed them in the hollow of a tree too far up for them to be seen from the ground, and hearing Mr. Merryman say that the tree was to be felled, he was compelled to remove the letters.

The visit of Archie to the Merryman home had left an avenue of escape, and he watched his opportunity when the wanderer was about to depart to slip them in the pocket of his coat; and the old man went to "My Lady's Manor," unconscious that he was bearing a message that would take Hilda from the home where he had placed her.

Perry was anxious to do all he could to atone, and as a commencement was willing to leave a game of ball to carry a note from Mrs. Merryman to "Friedenheim," that Rev. Carl might know the whole story before writing that evening to Mrs. Warfield, enclosing the letters.

Mrs. Warfield was one who never dallied over a known duty. Her answer came by return mail, and had Hilda been destitute of a home, or situated less happily than she was, the letter would have given her unmingled satisfaction. As it was, it brought to her heart and to that of another a chill of bitter disappointment.

Mrs. Warfield wrote that she had received the paper containing the notice of Mrs. Ashley's death while ill from the effect of the railway accident, and the nervous terror resulting from it had kept her from traveling since. She explained that Mrs. Lacy having gone to France to reside, she had no one to communicate with, and had written to the postmaster at Dorton asking the name of any friend of Mrs. Ashley whom she could address. He replied, but had taken so little interest in the matter that he sent the name of Mrs. Reginald Farnsworth, of San Francisco.

Mrs. Warfield wrote immediately, and after several weeks she received a letter saying that Mrs. Farnsworth was traveling in Europe, but the letter

had been forwarded by the postmaster in response to Mrs. Warfield's request.

She never received a reply, and still hoped the time would come when she could visit Dorton and learn for herself what she had used all means in her power to know through others. She added that she was rejoiced to know that Mrs. Ashley had intrusted Hilda to her care, and so far as lay in her power the trust should be faithfully cherished.

The letter concluded by saying that her eldest son would visit Philadelphia the following week, and would take great pleasure in going to Dorton to accompany Hilda to the home that would welcome her gladly.

The evening of the day that this letter was received found Mr. Valentine Courtney in consultation with his sister, and the next morning that lady visited Mrs. Merryman, going early that she might see Hilda before she set out for school.

Mrs. Courtney having—as she reminded Mrs. Merryman—no daughter of her own, asked as a favor that she be allowed to exercise her taste in

providing an outfit for Hilda which might not be convenient to obtain in her new home.

Mrs. Merryman, taking the offer in the spirit it was made, gave glad consent, and it was decided that Hilda should accompany Mrs. Courtney to Baltimore that morning upon a shopping expedition.

This was a charming surprise to Hilda. She was ready by the time Mrs. Courtney and Mrs. Merryman had discussed the needs of the prospective young traveler, and it seemed like a fairy story that instead of walking to school, she was spinning along the pleasant road between Dorton and Baltimore in a roomy, comfortable carriage behind a pair of fine bay horses, and with the charming companionship of Mrs. Courtney.

Shopping proved to be the most attractive of amusements as they drove from one business house to another, and to the inexperienced girl Mrs. Courtney's purse seemed inexhaustible.

"One article that Mrs. Merryman and I agreed upon as being indispensable is a large trunk," Mrs. Courtney remarked as they reached the city. "We

will buy it the first article, and all the other purchases can be taken home in it."

Hilda was charmed with the selection made. It was handsome, substantial and commodious, with many little compartments dear to the heart of the feminine traveler.

The buying of dress goods came next, and Hilda was in her element, and Mrs. Courtney was surprised at the judgment she evinced in selecting what was suitable to her age and appearance.

Wraps, hats, gloves, ruffles, and all the articles which complete a girl's wardrobe were rapidly filling the trunk which Mose had strapped on the rack on the back of the carriage.

"Now, dear Hilda, I have a favor to ask of you, and that is to sit for your picture. Mrs. Merryman wishes one, I should like to have one, and brother Valentine would be pleased to have you present one to him."

"And one for Miss Jerusha Flint," supplemented Hilda, laughingly.

"Of course," assented Mrs. Courtney, amused at the suggestion. "But first we will take luncheon

at the ladies' restaurant where I always go upon these shopping tours, then to the picture gallery, then to a dressmaker's to be fitted, and I think we will feel that we have made very good use of our time."

"But, dear Mrs. Courtney, would it not be better to wait for the photograph until one of these new dresses is made?"

"No, dear, we prefer seeing you in the pink cashmere. It is the same you wore when last at 'My Lady's Manor,' and is very becoming. We will go now and have a good luncheon which will refresh us for our afternoon's shopping."

The gallery was visited and the sweet face of Hilda imaged for the friends she was soon to leave, the dresses fitted, and she supposed all they had come to do was accomplished.

"We have had a pleasant day together, Hilda," said her friend, "and I wish to give you a remembrance of it and of me—something useful as well as ornamental. Would you like a watch?"

No need to wait for an answer; the beaming eyes, smiling lips and rosy tint which rose to the fair

face were more expressive than words, and Mrs. Courtney led the way to a jeweler's where she again had occasion to admire the innate refinement and courtesy of Hilda. What the donor selected was her choice, and her pleasure was enhanced and the value of the gift increased by the inscription which Mrs. Courtney requested should be engraved on the inner side of the case: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

It was left with the jeweler to be brought out to "Friedenheim" by Mr. Courtney. Then they turned their faces homeward, and thus ended this red letter day in the life of Hilda.

It had always been a foregone conclusion that anything in which Mrs. Courtney took part proved to be a success; therefore the pretty new gowns, the watch and the cabinet pictures reached "Friedenheim" in good time, and were satisfactory in every respect.

Mrs. Warfield's son Paul came at the appointed time and was, in the eyes of Mr. Valentine Courtney—who, with his sister, called that evening to see him and bid good-bye to Hilda—a young Apollo.

In the opinion of the others—Hilda not excepted—he was a tall, finely formed young man, with good features, dark hair and eyes and a firm mouth and chin.

He bore well his part in the after-supper conversation, and Hilda had a feeling of pride that her Aunt Ashley's nephew was so worthy the attention of her Dorton friends, while he was more than pleased with them all.

"He is young, handsome, cultured, well educated and agreeable," thought Mr. Courtney. "There is every reason for Hilda to become attached to him now that they will be under the same roof."

Obeying the request of Mrs. Courtney, and her own inclination, Hilda selected the most perfect of the pictures of herself to give to Mr. Courtney, and had gone to her room early in the evening and had brought it down to the parlor to have it in readiness to give when he arose to leave.

It was given and accepted, farewells were said, and the Courtneys went to their homes; then Hilda, who had borne herself bravely during the evening, bade Mr. and Mrs. Merryman and Paul good-night

and went to her room, and from the window looked with tear-dimmed eyes upon "My Lady's Manor."

She watched the light gleaming in the library where she knew that Mr. Courtney was sitting alone, and when at a late hour it disappeared she retired and wept until slumber closed her eyes.

The next morning was bright and beautiful, and, refreshed by sleep, and possessing the hope and buoyancy of youth when not crushed out by affliction or cruelty, Hilda arose and dressed for her journey in the pretty new traveling dress, which, with hat and gloves, she had placed in readiness before retiring.

Descending to breakfast, the first object that met her gaze was a bouquet of roses which she knew at a glance had come from Mr. Courtney. She had been accustomed to seeing flowers all her life, but these seemed the sweetest and loveliest she had ever known. She examined each bud and blossom, and admired anew the donor's name and compliments upon the card.

Tears were in Mrs. Merryman's eyes, and tender-hearted Norah wept, when Hilda, equipped for the

journey, stood, bouquet in hand, ready to go to the carriage which Perry brought to the gate.

"Good-bye, dear Aunt Merryman!" she said, putting an arm around that faithful friend as they stood upon the piazza.

"Good-bye, dear Hilda!" responded the lady as she pressed kisses upon the lips and the fair brow of the girl. "We shall miss you; do not forget us."

"How can I forget, when I have found mother and father in you and Uncle Merryman?"

"And, Hilda," continued Mrs. Merryman in a low tone, and noticing that Mr. Merryman and Paul were engaged in parting words—"never, never let your Aunt Ashley's prayer grow dim in your memory."

"No, dear Aunt Merryman, I will always look upon it as my guide through life, and with it will associate you who have tenderly kept it in my remembrance; and see," she added with a sudden flush of color to her cheeks, "it is being answered, in part, at least, for my home and that of Aunt Sarah Warfield will be one and the same."

They all walked down the path to the waiting

carriage, Mr. Merryman helped her in and bade her good-bye; then with a few last words they were on their way to the Dorton station while Mr. and Mrs. Merryman returned slowly to the house feeling that something sweet and pleasant had been removed from their home and lives, never again to be restored.

In a few minutes the travelers reached Baltimore, where the train halted, and to Hilda's surprise and pleasure Mr. Valentine Courtney appeared at the window by which she was seated, his handsome face growing brighter when he saw his roses in her hand.

"They are lovely; I treasure them!" she said, touching them with her lips.

"And this, also, I hope," he said, putting a small package in her hand.

"I know I shall," she answered, flushing with surprise and anticipation, giving him a smile and glance which lingered long in his memory. She waved her hand in farewell, and they were gone. And he returned to his office, and in the evening to

"My Lady's Manor," feeling more desolate than he had ever been in his life.

The world in which he had lived since taking possession of his home was not, as it had been, the matter-of-fact world of business alone. It was a new world, rosy with sweet companionship and hope; morning sunshine which had now given place to evening clouds and coming darkness.

He tried to think that he was no more desolate than before he had known Hilda, but his reasonings brought no comfort. He was not—as when Anna was taken from him—reconciled to the lot which he had in Christian faith looked upon as not only out of his power to prevent, but as something which God willed, and it was therefore his Christian duty to be submissive.

Had Hilda been a few years older, Paul Warfield should not have taken her away before he had made known his attachment. He had not done this, believing it not honorable to fetter her with a promise before she had seen anything of the world. Now she was gone, and he was grieved that he had given

her no hint of his feelings. He realized that he had been unjust to himself and to her.

As soon as possible after they were again on their way, Hilda untied the packet and brought to view a crimson velvet case in which was a fine picture of Mr. Courtney.

"Oh, it is so like him, so exactly like him!" she exclaimed in delight, as Paul bent his stately head to look upon it. "Isn't he the very handsomest man you ever saw?"

"He is very elegant looking, indeed, Cousin Hilda," responded Paul heartily.

"And just as good as he is handsome! He is so kind to everybody and urges poor Archie, who saved my life, to make his home at 'My Lady's Manor,' and pass his days in rest and comfort; but Archie will stay only for a night, preferring to wander about."

"He is handsome and of noble presence, Cousin Hilda," remarked Paul as he saw her looking again upon the picture, "but I cannot agree with you that he is the handsomest man I ever saw, and he is somewhat gray."

"Only a little upon the temples," said Hilda eagerly. "Some persons turn gray early."

"Wait until you have seen my brother Fred,' said Paul, a little confusedly. "Do not think me boastful, Cousin Hilda, but all agree that Fred is very handsome, and he is young."

"I suppose he looks like you," said Hilda, in all sincerity.

"Girls never see me when Fred is around. He seems to know exactly what to say to interest them."

"And 'My Lady's Manor' is such a lovely place," resumed Hilda. "I wish you could have stayed even one day longer and visited there and at 'Friedenheim.' They are such beautiful places, and my friends are all so kind."

"They are indeed charming people. I was glad to meet them and would have enjoyed remaining, but, little cousin, I have something to tell you. Shall it be now?"

"Yes, now," echoed the girl eagerly.

"I told your Dorton friends that we would remain in Philadelphia until to-morrow with Mr. and

Mrs. De Cormis, old friends of my father. A niece of Mr. De Cormis from Woodmont, a village near my home in Ohio, is visiting there, and I am glad to have you become acquainted."

"Is she a dear friend of yours?"

"Yes, the dearest."

"Did she come to Philadelphia with you?"

"No, she has been there several weeks. She has many friends there to visit, for she lived there all her life until the past four years, when she and her father came to Woodmont. Her father, Rev. Horace De Cormis, is pastor of our church and is one of the best of men."

"Will she go back to Ohio with us?"

"No, her visit is not yet completed. Her uncle, Mr. Robert De Cormis, and his family wish her to remain the winter with them, but she is a devoted daughter and is not willing to leave her father longer than a fortnight more. You may know that we were glad to meet again."

"You love each other, then?"

"Oh, little cousin, when you see her you will understand how impossible it would be not to love

her! If nothing prevents, we expect to be married before another autumn."

"I am glad, Cousin Paul, and hope you will be very happy."

"Thank you, cousin; I am sure you wish it. I cannot fail being happy with Lura De Cormis."

"What style of person is she, Cousin Paul?"

"She is faultlessly fair, has coal black hair and brilliant black eyes, lips like coral, perfect teeth, and her hands are small, white, and beautifully formed."

"She must be beautiful," commented Hilda. "I hope she will love me. Is it easy to make her acquaintance?"

"She is considered very reserved, but she is interested in you. I am sure you cannot help being congenial friends."

Paul's fiancée was out when the travelers arrived at the handsome home of Mr. Robert De Cormis.

Mrs. De Cormis received them cordially and conducted Hilda to the pretty apartment she was to occupy, then left her that she might make her toilet for dinner.

Hilda took girlish delight in arraying herself

in one of the new gowns, which fitted her lithe figure perfectly and was charmingly becoming.

She heard the door-bell ring, and heard the sound of cheery voices and descended to the parlor to meet Miss Lura De Cormis. Paul met her at the door and led her to the alcove window where the young lady stood, so absorbed in reading a letter just received from her father that she did not hear Hilda's step upon the soft carpet.

The introduction was given and when Hilda looked upon the face of the future Mrs. Paul Warfield she saw a younger and fairer, but with those exceptions, a living image of Jerusha Flint.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE GYPSY ENCAMPMENT

It was evening of a cloudless day when Paul and Hilda reached the Warfield farmhouse, which was looking charmingly picturesque in the ruby-red glow of the sunset.

The flowers in the lawn were giving out their sweetness, and birds in the maples were singing their vesper songs as if in greeting to the travelers.

Mrs. Warfield's welcome to both was tenderly kind, and the marked resemblance she bore to Mrs. Ashley was a joy to Hilda.

Separated from those whose loving kindness had made life a holiday to her, she had again found a home and a mother.

"I will not weary you, my dear, by questioning now, but will give you the opportunity to refresh yourself after your journey," said Mrs. Warfield,

and, conducting Hilda to a pleasant room adjoining her own, she left her to herself and returned to the parlor to talk with Paul.

"Her beauty quite bewildered me, it was so unexpected," she said, laying her hand upon his shoulder as he sat by the window, newspaper in hand.

"Yes, and the Merrymans spoke of the sweetness of her disposition. She will be a charming companion for you, mother."

"I know I will love her as a daughter. How did you like the family who have so kindly cared for her?"

"I never met strangers whom I admire more. We have taken her from an excellent home, mother, and must try to make her happy here."

"We will. And now tell me of my future daughter-in-law," continued Mrs. Warfield, with a smile. "I hope she is well and happy."

"Perfectly so," replied the young man, smiling in turn and reddening slightly. "She sent her love to her future mother-in-law."

"For which I am duly obliged. When does she expect to come home?"

"In a fortnight, and has promised to be my wife within the year. Mother dear, you will have more daughters than you can manage!"

"Yes, I can count upon three. Fred will be bringing me a daughter one of these days, I suppose."

"If he can keep in love with any one girl long enough. He is fickle, and the girls seem to know it."

"He is a jolly, generous, conscientious boy," commented his mother with a glow of pride. "I don't believe he would intentionally wound the feelings of anyone, and I hope the girls he flirts with understand that he means nothing serious."

A step was heard on the stairs, and in a moment Hilda appeared at the parlor door.

"I think I told you on our journey that Fred is reading law with an attorney in Springfield," remarked Paul, as he arose to give her a chair.

"Yes, and you also said that you expected him this evening."

"I did, and he has come," exclaimed Paul, glancing eagerly toward the door, for quick footsteps

were coming toward it, and a buoyant voice nad called, "Mother, where are you?"

"Here!" responded Mrs. Warfield, her eyes beaming with pleasure. "Come and welcome your new cousin!"

Fred came forward in his easy, graceful manner and was presented in due form.

"They are as handsome as pictures," thought Mrs. Warfield proudly. "The Garden of Eden could scarcely have shown a handsomer couple."

"How are you, old fellow?" said Fred, turning with a bright smile to shake hands with his brother.

"In fine health and spirits, and I see you are the same."

"I thought you were not coming until late. Having you in time for supper is an unexpected pleasure," said his mother.

"I intended coming out on the evening train, but there are gypsies encamped in Mr. Barry's woods, and some of the young people of Springfield came out in carriages to have their fortunes told, and insisted that I should come with them, and here I am."

"I have not the least belief in gypsies or in fortune telling, but I am glad you are here. Now we will go to the tea table."

With an arm about his mother's waist, Paul led the way, and Fred, with a radiant smile of pleasure, offered his arm to Hilda, who accepted with a smile and blush.

If Mrs. Warfield allowed herself to be proud of anything, it was of her sons, and not without reason. They were sensible, well educated, attentive to business, and honorable in their dealings, and mothers with marriageable daughters could not forbear pointing out, or at least alluding to the excellence of these damsels when in the society of Sarah Warfield.

If it be true that happy people have no history, then nothing could have been recorded of Fred Warfield, for Mother Destiny had willed that his pathway from babyhood should lie in sunshine, never in shadow. He had experienced but few disappointments and fewer trials to dampen his exuberant spirits; but light, almost trifling as he was in manner, his intimates knew that beneath it all was

a warm, affectionate nature, a steadfast love for what was good, and a wish to help others to enjoy life, as he undoubtedly did.

That he was captivated by every new face and fickle in his attachments was known to all who were acquainted with him, but they looked upon it as no more than might be expected of a handsome youth who was courted and admired in society, a fault which age and experience would correct.

That evening at the farmhouse was an ideally happy one to him, the only shadow to its brightness being the knowledge that he could not study law in Springfield and at the same time remain under the home roof without attracting attention to the fact that it was because Hilda was there.

Without appearing to notice, Mrs. Warfield took note of Fred's manner to the young girl, and read his thoughts as accurately as if inscribed upon the page of an open book, and resolved to have a more serious conversation with him than she had ever had in regard to his failing.

If it lay in her power to prevent it, there should

be no trifling with the affections of any girl, no blighted happiness laid to the charge of her sons.

"It is really too beautiful this evening to stay indoors," remarked Fred, when, tea finished, they returned to the parlor. "Mother, I will have Planchette put to the carriage and take you and cousin Hilda for a drive."

"I would enjoy it, but Hilda will excuse me this evening, as several ladies are coming from the village to help arrange for a fair to be held in the hall there, but that need not prevent you and Hilda from going."

"We will drive past the gypsy encampment," said Fred eagerly, turning to Hilda. "It is really romantic; I could scarcely tear myself away. You will go, won't you, cousin?"

No need to ask. Hilda's face showed her delight in anticipation of something so new and altogether enchanting.

"I hope you will not encourage the gypsies by stopping to listen to their foolishness," said Mrs. Warfield gently.

"Oh, I would not have them tell my fortune for anything!" ejaculated Hilda. "I would be afraid they would tell me something evil."

"That would depend upon what you paid them," smiled Mrs. Warfield.

Fred made no comment, but hurried out to give orders for the conveyance.

"Now, cousin mine," he said as it came to the gate, "allow me to assist you," and with easy grace he took the filmy white scarf from Hilda's hand and placed it adroitly and becomingly on her brown hair and a few minutes later Planchette was speeding away with the long swinging trot which characterized her.

Fred had said truly that nothing could be pleasanter than the drive to the encampment, and nothing more romantic than the scene upon which they looked a little later.

In order to observe, and, as he thought, be unobserved, Fred selected as a good place to halt a part of the forest separated from the encampment by a running brook and the thick screen of willows on either side, between the trunks of which they

could, with but slight obstruction, have a good view of the camp.

In the foreground were two small tents, in front of which was burning a bright fire of brushwood.

Two forked sticks supported an iron rod from which was suspended a tea kettle, clouds of steam issuing from lid and spout.

Upon a large box which served as a table a middle-aged woman had spread a white cloth, and was placing upon it dishes of different colors, and with an eye to effect.

A young and handsome gypsy in a scarlet dress and with a plaid kerchief about her shapely throat was seated under a large oak tree that spread its protecting arms over the tents.

Her swarthy yet clear complexion was smooth as satin, her eyes were large, brown and lustrous, and her crimson lips parted frequently in smiles at the gambols of the child at her feet, showing her perfect teeth. Two robust little boys played about the mossy bank, upon whom her eyes rested with pride.

Back of the tents stood two substantial, covered

wagons, and under the oaks beside them lay three gypsy men, idly watching the horses, which, held by ropes, were cropping the grass within reach.

"It looks so lovely and peaceful," commented Hilda. "I wish an artist were here to sketch it."

"The full moon is rising," said Fred, turning to look through the window of the carriage; "the tops of the trees are becoming silvered, which adds to the beauty. Would you like to be a gypsy, Cousin Hilda?"

"At this hour it would be charming to encamp; but during the bitter cold and snow-storms of winter the poor creatures must suffer."

"No danger but they will keep warm so long as there is wood to steal; besides, they are accustomed to rough it," said Fred lightly.

"And yet they suffer sometimes from exposure. When I was a child Dr. Lattinger attended a gypsy who was ill of pneumonia. Their encampment was in the woods near Dorton during two months of winter, and Dr. Lattinger saw her twice a day. He said they were very respectful to him, and in sympathy for the sick woman and in care of her were

much like our own people. They were of the tribe of Stanley."

"Yes, I suppose they have good and evil among them as have other communities, but it is the general belief that gypsies are not trustworthy."

"Which of those women is the fortune-teller?"

"Neither of those. I do not see her. She must be in one of the tents."

"Is she handsome?"

"Handsome! She is gray and wrinkled, and toothless and swarthy, cross-grained and disagreeable in every way. Phew!" grimaced Fred, at the remembrance of the prophetess.

"She did not please you in your fortune, I think," laughed Hilda.

"She was not very clever to me, that is certain. Jack Prettyman gave her the largest fee, and is to marry a rich and beautiful girl and live in Europe."

"What did she tell you?"

"She paid me a few compliments, which no doubt I deserve. She caught me mimicking her, and I never saw such a look of malignant hate as crossed her ugly face."

"Had you no faith in her predictions, then?"

"No; yet I felt almost startled when she described my mother and my home better than I could have done. She also told me of some of my flirtations," continued Fred, laughingly, while he reddened. "The old vixen said I would meet my match at no distant day, and would receive no pity, and deserve none."

"How could she describe your mother and your home?" said his companion, amused at his discomfiture. "She had never seen them, had she?"

"Not that I am aware of, but these strollers have sources of information unsuspected by honest individuals. She could not have told me so much of my life since childhood had not someone given her the information."

"What did she tell the ladies who came with you?"

"Something that pleased them very much, judging by their happy looks and smiles. We tried to persuade them to tell us, but they would only give us scraps and hints which might have been told any young lady and not been far wrong."

"They are such good-looking people. I imagined that all gypsies had a wild, degraded look."

"These are the most respectable ones I have seen, so far as appearances go, especially that one by the oak tree. They also belong to the illustrious house of Stanley."

Fred's laugh arose above the key to which they had been modulating their voices, and they realized that it had attracted the attention of the gypsies.

The men arose, and tying the horses, stood awhile looking about them, conversing in a low tone, then went to the brook, laved hands and face, and went to supper.

"Cousin Hilda," said Fred, who had been gazing intently at the horses, "I believe that beautiful cream-colored one is the very animal that was stolen from an innkeeper in Springfield about two years ago."

"But there are many cream-colored horses; how could you be certain that this is the one? Or why do you imagine it is?"

"By the peculiar manner in which she tosses her head. The one I speak of belonged to a circus com-

pany and had been trained to perform several tricks. I feel quite sure that this is the animal."

"But surely you do not intend hinting anything of the kind to them?" said Hilda, anxiously.

"No, but Planchette is perfectly quiet. If you will hold the lines a moment I will take a circuit and come up back of the tents, and while the gypsies are at supper will examine that horse."

"But what proof would a closer view give you?"

"One of the tricks of the circus horse was to kneel if touched upon a particular spot on his head. I know that spot and will put it to the test. You can watch from the carriage and see if I am right."

"Oh, Cousin Fred, do be careful! Suppose they should see you?"

"But I do not intend them to see me, and will be back in a moment." He swung himself lightly from the carriage and disappeared behind the thick underbrush.

Hilda gazed anxiously in the direction of the tents and saw Fred reach the place, keeping at the same time his attention upon the gypsies.

Patting the animal gently, and speaking in a low,

soothing tone, his fingers glided to a spot upon her forehead. Instantly the intelligent creature knelt and laid her mouth in the outstretched palm of Fred. He raised his arm and she arose to her feet; and convinced that he was not mistaken, Fred went swiftly behind the tents on the way back to the carriage.

He found Hilda with a blanched face, a look of terror in her eyes, and seeming almost on the verge of fainting.

"Oh, Fred," she whispered, "the fortune teller sprang from behind that bush the moment you left, and I cannot tell you the terrible things she said to me! She heard all you said and has gone to tell them."

Fred was no coward, nor was he foolhardy. He realized the danger they were in, and his cheek grew as pale as that of his companion.

A commotion was visible among the gypsies—loud talking, curses and threatening looks toward the carriage, and a general uprising from the table.

Fred sprang to his place beside Hilda, took the reins preparatory to flight, had turned Planchette's

head toward the road and reached to take the whip from the socket, when the bridle was grasped by one of the men.

"Halt, liar, and explain, or you shall not leave this place alive!" cried the gypsy, his black eyes blazing with fury.

For answer Fred brought the lash down upon his hand with a quick, stinging stroke. The bridle was released, and Planchette sprang forward just as a bullet whizzed through the back of the carriage between the heads of the occupants, and amid shouts and imprecations from men, women and children, they cleared the woods, and were in comparative safety.

"This is only loaned," exclaimed Fred, with flashing eyes, and face pale from anger and excitement. "I was single-handed, unarmed, and have a lady with me. It shall be returned with interest!"

"Oh, Fred," implored Hilda, almost faint from terror, "promise me not to molest them! I should never forgive myself if anything happened to you, which would surely be the case if you attacked them. Promise me!"

"That horse was stolen, Hilda; they should be made to return it! They fired upon me, and it is not through any merit in them that one of us is not lying dead at this moment. Would you wish me to leave all these things unpunished?"

"Yes, for we are the ones at fault. They did not go to us; we came to them."

"Then you wish me to act the coward's part by hiding their theft, and the attempt upon our lives?"

"Yes, all; all for the sake of your mother. Oh, to think that the very first evening of my coming I should be the cause of bringing anxiety and perhaps anguish upon her! Promise me, Fred, or I will not return to your house."

"You would despise me when you reflected upon it," commented the young man moodily. "Were I to follow your advice I would be of no credit to you."

"What credit would it be to you, or to anyone, to quarrel with gypsies? Supposing you were victorious and killed one or more of them, what would it add to your advantage or happiness?"

"The woman insulted and frightened you. What

man worthy of the name would allow it to go unpunished?"

"Words do not kill; I care nothing about them, and would not have told you only to warn you of the danger we were in. We were the aggressors."

"They should be driven from the neighborhood, which the authorities cannot do unless complaint be made against them, and you will not let me make it."

"We are unharmed, and have no right to complain against them when it was our own fault. They may not have stolen the horse, but bought it from someone who did, as I am sure if they had stolen it they would not encamp so near Springfield, where at any moment the horse is liable to be recognized."

"That looks reasonable," said Fred, reflectively.

"Let us keep it a secret, at least for some time. I am a girl, but I can keep it to myself."

"Agreed!" responded Fred.

"Promise that you will not pass the encampment on your way back to Springfield, will you?"

"No, I will go by the way of the Lakes, or the

Pacific, or around by California and the Isthmus of Panama, if you prefer."

"My mind is at rest now," said Hilda with an answering smile. "Thank you, Cousin Fred, I will go home with you now."

Her mind was at rest so far as concerned the safety of Fred, but her tried nerves could not recover their tone for many days. Her sleep was troubled, and in dreams she saw the wild faces of the gypsies, heard their shouts and imprecations, and saw Fred dying at her feet.

CHAPTER X

AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE

One evening nearly a year after the adventure with the gypsies, Fred came out on the train from Springfield to pass the night under the homestead roof, a thrill of boyish delight paying tribute to it, as always, but more pronounced now that it was the dwelling place of Hilda.

They were expecting him, and Mrs. Warfield, with motherly care, had seen that his favorite dishes were prepared for the evening meal, and with a glad light in her beautiful eyes, welcomed him.

"Where is Hilda, mother?" he asked, glancing inquiringly through the open door of the parlor, after pressing a filial salute upon the yet plump and rosy cheek.

"She is in the garden arranging bouquets for

the vases. She expects several of the young people from the village to pass the evening here."

"I hoped she would have no visitors this evening," commented Fred, a shadow crossing his handsome face.

"She invited them because she was quite sure you would be here, and, Fred, I hope you will divide your attentions among the girls, and not devote them to one of them, as you have a habit of doing. You know that you care for no one long at a time, so why do you give them reason for thinking you are in earnest?"

"Now, mother, that is cruel!" exclaimed Fred, reddening, while his dark eyes sparkled with amusement. "You will blight my prospects if you proclaim me fickle. I am afraid an earnest girl would be influenced by your opinion of me, and doubt my sincerity should I offer my hand and heart."

"The idea of a boy making an offer of his hand and heart!" laughed Mrs. Warfield.

"Twenty-one next fall, just in time to cast my first vote! Lots of fellows are settled in life at that age," and he gayly left the room in search of Hilda.

He did not follow the straight course, but instead took a circuitous path to the arbor, where sat Hilda upon a rustic chair, the table before her covered with flowers, and all framed in by the vine-covered arch.

Very deftly her fingers were adding sweet to sweet, apparently unconscious that a pair of handsome eyes were regarding her with admiration. Her simple gown of dark blue material fitted her graceful figure to perfection, and was finished at throat and wrists with filmy white frills. From the pocket of her white apron peeped the handles of bright scissors, and a broad-brimmed sun hat lay on the bench beside her. Her luxuriant hair was bound by a narrow crimson ribbon, and a crimson rose upon her breast cast its warm glow upon her rounded cheek.

This costume was considered by Fred as the most becoming of any in which he had seen her, yet he called to mind that he had thought the same of every toilet in which she appeared, only that the sunlight flickering through the leaves made the picture more lovely.

An incautious step upon a stick which snapped under the pressure betrayed his near approach. Hilda smiled but did not look up.

"Come in, Cousin Fred," she said; "don't be timid."

"How did you know it was Cousin Fred?" he asked, taking the hand she offered.

"I saw you when you left the house. You reminded me forcibly of the ostrich of school-book renown."

"Will you make a boutonniere for me to wear this evening?" he asked, laughing, in spite of his wish to frown.

"Certainly! I have just finished one for Cousin Paul. See the little beauty," and she took it up and inhaled its fragrance.

"Why do you bother to make one for Paul?" he asked, his smile becoming less pronounced. "You know he is engaged."

"Because, like yourself, he is, by courtesy, my cousin."

"But Miss Lura De Cormis is the one to make bouquets for him, leaving you at liberty to make

them for me, as I am not fortunate enough to claim a lady-love."

"Were Paul in Philadelphia or Miss Lura here, I am sure there would be no need for me to make a boutonniere for him; but she has gone to purchase her trousseau. Had you forgotten that, Cousin Fred?"

"I should say not, when I am to be best man, and you Miss Lura's bridesmaid."

"I would like more foliage for this large bouquet. Will you please get it for me?" and she gave him the scissors.

He obeyed her with a lingering glance upon the fair face bending over the flowers, and a resolve to tell her what was in his heart, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and it came as natural for Fred Warfield to speak of love to a pretty girl as it is for a broker to discuss the rise and fall of stocks, or an artist the lights and shades of a new study. In truth, it was his chief amusement, and practice had made him perfect.

Just now, however, he was ill at ease, and in his own eyes awkward and uncouth as, leaning against

the door frame of the arbor, he watched Hilda's active fingers add the foliage to the artistically arranged bouquet.

"You are very beautiful, cousin," he said almost involuntarily.

"I know it," she replied serenely, without glancing in his direction.

Fred gazed upon her in undisguised astonishment.

"This is not new to you; you have been told so by others," he said.

"By admiring glances and appreciative smiles, never in words."

"Do you consider it good form, Cousin Hilda, to express your opinion of your own beauty?" he inquired of her, with commendable hesitation.

"If you remember, cousin, it was not I who expressed the opinion; I only agreed with yours," and she gave minute attention to the placing of colors in the second bouquet.

"Yes," he responded uneasily, "but suppose someone else should tell you; some stranger, for instance.

It would not be good form to agree with a stranger's opinion."

"Thank you, cousin; you are very thoughtful, and I mean it for your comfort when I suggest that a stranger will not be at all likely to comment upon my beauty in my presence. That bridge is so far out of my latitude there is not the least danger of my having to cross it."

"You are so indifferent to me and my opinions, Cousin Hilda! You keep me quite out of spirits."

"I do not wish that; instead, I hope to see you in your very best spirits this evening, and willing to charm us with your choicest pieces on piano and mandolin. I wish I were the accomplished musician you are. You cast me in the shade."

"You will soon surpass me. Professor Ballini remarked the last time that he went back to Springfield in the train with me that 'Meesh Heelda haf ze exqueesite taalent for ze moozique; she is one woondare.'"

Fred was a good mimic. Hilda laughed heartily at the expression of face and tone of voice assumed for the occasion.

"Oh, Fred, I hope I won't think of you when I take my next lesson!" she said, wiping away tears of mirth with her handkerchief.

"You never wish to think of me; I am only Cousin Fred to you."

"Oh, yes, I do think of you, and am grateful for it is you who merit the praise for any progress I have made in music. You gave me such thorough instruction in the rudiments that my progress could not fail in pleasing Signor Ballini. You have been very kind to me."

"Then why not show a little interest in me? You know that I care for no one but you!"

"Oh, Fred, I should, instead, try not to have interest in you, except as a cousin!" replied the girl, flushing deeply as she bowed her head over her work.

"Why should you try? We are suited to each other in age, position and disposition!" was his quick reply.

"Not in disposition; you have not my quick temper."

"Temper, Cousin Hilda!" ejaculated Fred in sur-

prise. "We have never seen the least evidence of it."

"Because there has been no occasion; and, moreover, I have been taught to control it. Dear Aunt Merryman saw many an evidence of it."

"But we are wandering from the subject in hand. Have you forgotten that I asked you to care for me, and told you that I cared for no one but you?"

"No, I have not forgotten, but you have said the same to so many girls that I do not put much confidence in it."

"Now, cousin, that is too cruel, and I know who told you. It was Celeste Prettyman."

"Have you been flirting with her, too, Cousin Fred? She thinks you very handsome, and wonders that you are so much handsomer than Paul, when the same description answers for both."

"I suppose she compares me with her brother Jack. It is a pity that he is such a burlesque upon his own name. I take it for granted that he will be as awkward as ever this evening and will break his goblet and upset his chair before he leaves."

"Yes, one cannot help noticing his awkwardness,"

said Hilda, laughing in spite of herself; "but I think it is caused by embarrassment, and he has so many good traits that one can easily overlook such small defects."

"You seem to be well posted as to his good qualities. Please inform me of what they consist," remarked Fred dryly.

"In kindness to his mother and sister; in his genuine goodness, earnestness and stability; there is nothing trifling in his manner; one may be sure that he means what he says, and can depend fully upon him."

"You appear to have made quite a study of our friend Jack," commented Fred, flushing uneasily. "I scarcely thought that one year's acquaintance could make one so thoroughly competent to judge."

"But I have the opinion of others; everyone speaks well of Jack Prettyman."

"Have you more than a friendly interest in him?"

"Not at all; I never thought of such a thing; but am only saying what is my real opinion of him. He is your friend; you should be glad to know that he is appreciated."

"So I am in a certain sense, but if I tell the truth I must say that he is awkward and uncouth."

"That is owing to his having so little confidence in himself. He hasn't a particle of conceit. Conceited people are so comfortable that they can afford to be agreeable. It really appears to be a desirable thing to have a good opinion of one's self. Don't you realize this?"

"Do you speak from experience?"

"Yes, and from observation."

"Conceit would be too ridiculous in Jack Prettyman with his red head and pug nose."

"But he is very entertaining. The last time he took me out driving he taught me the language of flowers."

"I did not know that you go out driving with him," responded Fred, his face flushing and his eyes shadowed.

"Neither did I know that it was expected of me to inform you. Aunt Sarah sanctioned it and I supposed that sufficient."

"It is cruel in you to take that tone with me. Oh, Hilda, I feel so uncertain of you! You never

appear to believe me in earnest. Promise that you will not go driving with anyone but me."

"Wouldn't you think it selfish if I asked the same of you?"

"No, indeed; I promise gladly. Do you agree to it?"

"Yes, I don't care. Aunt Sarah and I drive out as often as I wish to go."

"Then you only agree because you sacrifice nothing. Hilda, why are you so cold, so indifferent to me? You keep me always anxious. Promise me—" taking her reluctant hand in his, "promise to be my wife!"

"Oh, Fred, what is the use of promising? You will change your mind as soon as you see a new face."

"Promise! I will not let go your hand until you do!"

"The tea-bell is about to ring. I heard Angie take it from the sideboard."

"Then promise!"

"I will," the hand was pressed, then released, and Hilda gathered up the bouquets.

"Here is yours, Cousin Fred," she said, holding the boutonniere toward him.

"I had forgotten it," he said, candidly.

"You will notice that I have arranged them according to their language. See, here is a sprig of arbor-vitæ:

" 'The true and only friend is he,
Who, like the arbor-vitæ tree,
Will bear our image in his heart.'

"With it I have placed

" 'The generous geranium
With a leaf for all who come.'

"Then a spray of myrtle:

" 'Myrtle placed on breast or brow,
Lively hope and friendship vow.'

"Then two pansies:

" 'Pray you love, remember,
There's pansies, that's for thought.' "

Fred placed the boutonniere without comment in the button-hole of his coat, and they went up the broad path to the house.

Mrs. Warfield read in Fred's happy face and in the bloom upon the fair cheek of Hilda that which

she had hoped for was in the way of being realized, but gave no evidence of it by word or manner—she would wait until the young people saw their own time to tell her of the agreement into which they had entered.

Fred was at his best that evening in the way of entertaining their guests, and Mrs. Warfield smiled at the dignity of his demeanor, bespeaking as it did the engaged young man, while Hilda comported herself as if engagements of marriage had ceased to be a novelty.

The luckless Jack Prettyman succeeded in passing one evening without upsetting his chair or breaking his goblet, and to all it was an enjoyable evening.

The next morning Fred arose earlier than usual and descended to the garden, which was dewy and fragrant, and wended his way to the arbor. Birds were twittering in the trees overhead, and colonies of ants dotted with their hills the ground at his feet. Innumerable filmy webs festooned the evergreen borders and flowering shrubs, which, jeweled with dewdrops, sparkled in the beams of the sun.

Happy as Fred had been in all his favored life,

he had never been so happy as that morning. Owing to the relations existing between them, he fully expected that Hilda would give him a few minutes of her society before he left for Springfield. But anxiously as he looked toward the house, he saw no evidence of her coming. Instead, Angie rang the bell and he went in to his breakfast, and found Hilda quietly reading by the window which commanded a view of the arbor.

"She could not have helped seeing me," thought Fred; "she might have come out for a few words!"

It had always been his custom to leave for Springfield as soon as breakfast was finished, and he had no excuse for waiting that morning. Moreover, Paul, his mother and Hilda lingered, as usual, to say good-bye before separating for the duties of the day.

"I may not let two weeks elapse before coming home next time, mother," he said, as he kissed her at parting.

"Come whenever it suits you, my son; your homecoming is always a joy to us."

Coke and Blackstone gave precedence to Hilda

Brinsfield in Fred's mind for several days after his visit home, and with chair tilted back, feet elevated and eyes closed, he recalled the conversation in the arbor, while alone in the office of Mr. Meade, attorney-at-law.

Mr. Meade noticed the abstraction and surmised the cause, but was not disturbed in the least, satisfied that in Fred's case the malady was not incurable.

CHAPTER XI

HILDA'S LETTERS TO HER OLD HOME

Hilda, in the meantime, was pursuing the even tenor of her way. Her church and Sabbath school duties were faithfully performed; she went daily to the Woodmont high school, enjoyed her music and art lessons, and took interest in the minor employments of the home which would have naturally devolved upon a daughter of the house. Always busy, cheerful, amiable and affectionate, she endeared herself more and more to the motherly heart of Mrs. Warfield.

Paul had taken upon himself the charge of the farm, thus relieving his mother of all care, and Ben Duvall, his efficient foreman and all-around helper, was living happily with his wife and children in their little home in the village, walking out to the

Warfield farm in the morning and back in the evening, satisfied with the world and all it contained.

One morning a few weeks after Hilda's engagement to Fred, she set out for a walk to the village, having several little commissions on hand, among them to call upon Mrs. Duvall with a message from Mrs. Warfield. Her heart was buoyant with the thought of the festivities that were to follow Paul's wedding, now near at hand, and her frequent meetings with the young people of the neighborhood in consequence. Her gown was being made by the village dressmaker and her first call was there, and all being satisfactory, she passed on to the neat home of Mrs. Duvall.

"Something told me that you would be here today, Miss Hilda," said Susie cordially, as she opened the door; "the chickens keep crowing and a little black spider came down from the ceiling, which is a sure sign of a visitor, and I said to myself, 'That is Miss Hilda.'"

"I am very glad you thought of me, Mrs. Duvall," smiled Hilda, amused at the superstition, as she took the proffered seat. "Here is a package of

cake Aunt Sarah sent to the children, and she told me to ask if it would be convenient for you to come three days of next week to help Angie. You know that Cousin Paul is to be married on Tuesday, and on Thursday evening we are to have a reception, and hope you can come on Tuesday morning."

"Nothing but sickness will prevent me, Miss Hilda," said Susie, warmly; "Mrs. Warfield has always been a kind friend to me and I love the two boys as if they were my own. You know I lived with Mrs. Warfield for years, and the farmhouse was a real home to me, and she was always good and kind to me."

"Yes, and aunt said she could always count upon you, and is quite sure you will come and help."

"I wish she could always count so surely upon that wife Paul is getting. I am fearful of it, Miss Hilda. Lura De Cormis has a temper, and what is more, she doesn't try to curb it."

"She is an only child," remarked Hilda, "and her mother died while she was very young and I suppose her father indulged her too much."

"Well, I reckon he thought he ought to put up with her bad temper, knowing that she got it from him. People that know him say that his high temper has been a terrible trial and cross to him, and he has grieved so much over it and over his unforgiving nature that he has bettered himself in both ways, as a minister ought to, if he expects to be an example for the people who hear him preach."

"I do hope for Aunt Sarah's sake that Lura will try to improve her temper; they are, as you know, to live together."

"Yes, and Miss Lura will be boss. Mrs. Warfield will have to give the right of way to her, if I know anything about Miss Lura De Cormis. It makes me sorry to think of it, for a sweeter, nobler Christian woman does not live than Mrs. Warfield, and everybody that knows her loves her.

"People in Springfield who knew her and her sister Janette when they were young said they were rich orphan girls, and that they and their brother Herbert lost nearly all through the failure of people who had their money in trust, but that did not spoil their sweet dispositions. Just think how Mrs. War-

field struggled along and kept that farm for the boys, and with it her generous nature that oppresses nobody but helps everybody along! I do wish that Miss Lura had her sweet, kind disposition," she concluded.

"Have you had any evidence of her temper, Mrs. Duvall?"

"Indeed I have! The last Sabbath school celebration we had, she had charge of one of the dinner tables, and my Johnny broke a tea cup. She was so angry at his carelessness, as she called it, that she shook him, and her black eyes fairly blazed. She made him pick up every scrap on a newspaper. She said that if I would make him behave himself at home, he would do so when out in company."

Hilda had heard the subject of Miss Lura's temper discussed, but not so freely as by Susie, and knew that what she said was entirely correct. In her own mind she believed that no one could resemble Jerusha Flint so closely without partaking of her nature. "I do hope that Cousin Paul has made a good choice," she said sadly.

"I hope that both boys will make good choices.

Folks say that Fred has a notion of getting married, too."

"Do they?" asked Hilda, her face flushing.

"Yes, to a girl in Springfield," continued Mrs. Duvall, not noticing her visitor's embarrassment. "She is a great friend of Miss Lura's and of course will be at the wedding and you will have a chance to see her."

"I never heard that Cousin Fred was waiting upon anyone in Springfield," said Hilda faintly.

"No, I reckon not. Fred Warfield waits upon so many girls it is hard to keep track of him. It was about a month ago that I heard it, so most likely he has dropped the Springfield girl and is in love with another. He always had a sweetheart, sometimes one, and sometimes another, ever since I first knew him."

Hilda breathed more freely. It had been a fortnight since Fred had engaged himself to her, and Mrs. Duvall evidently knew nothing of his attachment. Fred had told her of the girl in Springfield that last time he was at home, and in his happy-go-lucky manner had made merry over the flirtation

between them, at which Mrs. Warfield had reproved him while she vainly tried to conceal her amusement at his travesty of the affair.

"That Fred Warfield was always the best-natured fellow that ever lived," resumed Mrs. Duvall. "Paul would get mad sometimes, but Fred you couldn't make mad no matter what happened. He just made merry over everything and was the kindest, tenderest-hearted boy that ever lived, and wouldn't hurt the feelings of a fly."

"I must go now, Mrs. Duvall," said Hilda, rising. "Aunt Sarah will be glad to know that you can come. I have to call at Uncle Herbert's store for spices and other things, and will ask him to send them here for Mr. Duvall to bring out in the morning if convenient for him to do so."

"Certainly, Miss Hilda! Nothing pleases him better than to oblige Mrs. Warfield or any of the family. I will be sure to come early, and please tell Mrs. Warfield that I can stay as long as she needs me."

"She will be glad to know that, and Aunt Sarah requests you not to walk to the farmhouse, for I

am to drive to the dressmaker's in the village on Tuesday morning for my gown and will take you home with me."

"What kind of a gown are you having made, Miss Hilda, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"A white silk, and the bride's is white satin. It was made in Philadelphia and is very elegant."

"They can well afford to have fine clothes for Miss Lura," commented Mrs. Duvall. "People who know them in Springfield say that Mr. De Cormis got a fortune from France, where his grandfather came from. He needn't preach if he don't want to, but he likes to live in the country, and wants only a small church, so has here what suits him."

"It would interest you to go to the church on Tuesday evening and see them married, Mrs. Duvall?"

"It certainly would, and I'll go. A cat can look at a queen, I reckon, whether the queen looks at her or not."

Hilda laughed, and then nodding good-morning to Mrs. Duvall, drove to the store, made her purchases and went home.

Tuesday evening came, the church was filled to overflowing, and Rev. Horace De Cormis gave his daughter to the one above all others whom he would have selected had he done the choosing.

Beautiful as was Hilda at all times, she never looked more lovely than upon that occasion, and Mrs. Duvall was not the only one whose gaze wandered to the handsome attendants, who expected to be only secondary objects of interest.

The evening reception at the parsonage was followed by that given by Mrs. Warfield, and this in turn by friends of the bride among her father's congregation. The quiet neighborhood had never known such a festive time.

Fred was always mentioned as Hilda's escort to these festivities and was an attentive and courtly cavalier. Hilda's confidence in him became firmly established and confidence became esteem, which she mistook for love.

Mrs. Lura Warfield remained several weeks at the parsonage, then became one of the home circle of the Warfield farmhouse. Yet her taking up her abode in a new home did not prevent her from keep-

ing her place as head of her father's household. She attended to his wardrobe, visited the poor and ailing of his congregation, purchased the supplies, answered his letters, and in every way in her power kept him from realizing the loss he had sustained in her marriage and her removal to another home.

Mrs. Lura was a good, dutiful daughter, and there was scarcely a day passed that she was not engaged upon some work for him, and Hilda was glad that there was something to interest her outside the farmhouse. Sometimes by invitation she accompanied her, driving Planchette to Mrs. Lura's phaeton, and could not help admiring the executive ability of the brilliant little woman.

Although she had seen but little exhibition of a Jerusha Flint temper, Hilda never gave up the conviction that it was there, only waiting occasion to be called forth. Many traits which she remembered as being possessed by the adversary of her childhood were noticeable in this fair and refined-looking prototype.

Mrs. Paul Warfield resembled Jerusha Flint in her untiring industry and her methodical habits,

her uncompromising neatness, her ability, her satirical opinion of anything that failed to agree with her ideas and her extreme selfishness. She had a much better education than had Jerusha and her environment had been of the best, but the texture of her mind was no finer; she was cold, calculating and heartless. In short, Mrs. Lura was so much like the one with whom part of her childhood had passed that, try as she might, Hilda could not persuade herself to love her.

Happy as was the young girl in her Ohio home, and tenderly kind as were Mrs. Warfield and her sons to her, she did not forget her Dorton friends. She looked eagerly for letters from them, and the most trifling incidents which interested her Maryland acquaintances were full of interest to her, and knowing this, Mrs. Merryman let nothing which came to her notice pass unmentioned.

Hilda was informed of Erma attending school in Baltimore, staying five days out of the week with her grandparents there, of Norah's faithfulness, and Perry's improvement in all branches of farm work, of everything in fact that would keep

up Hilda's interest and affection for those who loved her and held her in remembrance.

It was the rule from the beginning that after the Merryman household had read Hilda's letters, they were passed on to "Friedenheim," for the Courtneys had always evinced much interest in her, and she had made no restrictions in regard to her letters.

When Mrs. Courtney had read them aloud to her family they were sent the same evening by Mose to "My Lady's Manor," and in this way Mr. Valentine Courtney was kept in touch with Hilda's everyday life.

When she left Dorton "My Lady's Manor" lost its charm for him. He missed the gentle girl more than he had ever before missed a human being, and felt that life was scarcely worth living when she was not there to brighten it.

He tried to arouse himself from what he considered unmanly weakness, but without avail. He went from his home each morning disconsolate, and returned to it despairing. Had it not been for the efficient management of Mrs. Flynn within doors

and Sandy MacQuoid without, home life would have been at low ebb. But these faithful servitors, without appearing to notice the changed manner of their once cheerful employer, attended to their allotted duties, enjoyed each other's society, fed the terrier and the parrot, entertained the Courtney boys and Ralph and James Rivers, and Norah and Archie, to the best of their ability, when they gave "My Lady's Manor" the pleasure of their company.

The first gleam of comfort which Mr. Courtney received lay in the knowledge of Paul Warfield's engagement. Each succeeding letter of Hilda's spoke of Fred, dwelt much upon him, but for months it did not occur to Mr. Courtney to fear a rival in him. Hilda was so unrestrained in speaking of him, even making merry over his love affairs, more as an older sister would jest of a young brother or some other jolly companion than a maiden of a lover. Then came a time when Fred's name dropped from her letters, and a grave maturity came into them, unnoticed by any reader save Mr. Courtney; and then it dawned upon him that he

had indeed a rival. His heart ached with its burden of unrest; his home had grown into a prison; he felt that he must leave it and seek change from the thoughts which oppressed him; he resolved to close "My Lady's Manor" and pass at least a year in travel. Ralph and James Rivers could attend to the law business, and if it suffered financial loss in their hands it was of but little moment to one of Mr. Courtney's wealth and disposition.

One evening after coming to this decision, he sat alone in his library. It was cool for the season and Chloe had made a glowing fire upon the hearth before which he sat, lost in thought.

Rich curtains hung in heavy folds over the windows, the glow of an astral lamp on the table beside him gave light for reading, but books had lost their charm. Pictures with sunny Italian skies, of Alpine peaks, of arctic snows, of fair English landscapes, lined the walls. Comfort and beauty was on every hand, but they brought him no happiness.

Chloe came with a letter upon a silver waiter, presented it and quietly withdrew. And Mr. Courtney, with a presentiment of further unrest in store

for him, opened it and read to the end. It was from Hilda to Mrs. Merryman, and as Mr. Courtney finished it he contrasted his feelings with those of light-headed, light-hearted Mose, who had brought it, and whose boyish laughter was heard from the kitchen where he was recounting to Chloe some of the adventures in which he was, as usual, the hero.

There was no mention of Fred throughout the letter, but a postscript was added which thrilled his heart with pain.

"Dear Aunt Grace," it said, "I feel that it would not be right not to tell you, my dear second mother, that Cousin Fred has asked me to be his wife and I have accepted him. Aunt Sarah says it is what she has hoped for, and in this way Aunt Ashley's prayer will be answered."

Mr. Courtney knew the trial it had been to Hilda to write this. He was glad at the prospect of happiness for her in her future home, but he groaned in spirit at the thought of his own loneliness. How was he to pass the years of life allotted to him? After a time he rang the bell and Sandy appeared.

"I wish to have a few minutes conversation with you, Sandy," he said, as his stately Scotch servitor stood respectfully beside his chair. "Take a seat."

Sandy obeyed, his well-trained countenance showing no surprise.

"When I employed you," said Mr. Courtney, "I did not foresee that I would wish to leave "My Lady's Manor." Circumstances have made it necessary that I should seek change. I have sent for you to tell you this, and to express my hope that this sudden resolve may not inconvenience you. I shall advance you three months' salary for any disappointment it may be to you, and will do the same by Mrs. Flynn when I speak to her, which will be this evening. Chloe can go back to her old home at 'Friedenheim.' "

"Excuse me, sir, for asking, but do you expect to return here sometime?"

"I may, Sandy; I cannot say."

"I do not wish to pry into your affairs, sir, but do you intend renting this place?"

"No, it will be closed for the time I am absent."

"You have encouraged me, sir, to make free to

tell you my plan," said Sandy, gravely. "Perhaps you will do us a greater favor than to advance three months' salary."

"Us?" echoed Mr. Courtney, looking up in surprise.

"Yes, sir; Mrs. Flynn and myself are intending to marry."

Mr. Courtney smiled almost cheerfully.

"That is news indeed, Sandy, and very agreeable news," he said. "She will make you a good wife."

"And she will have a good husband," responded Sandy.

"You are right. What do you propose as to housekeeping?"

"I am not sure as yet, sir. We had intended, if you were willing, to remain here with you in the same positions we now occupy. We know that we could find no better home than this. Now that you are going away, no coachman or housekeeper will be needed by you, but perhaps you will let us stay and take care of 'My Lady's Manor' while you are away."

"I will be more than willing; it will relieve me of a great care," replied Mr. Courtney cordially.

"If there is nothing in Dorton for me to do, I can, I think, get some employment in the neighborhood," continued Sandy, reflectively.

"I am not anxious to dispose of the horses, Sandy. If you can get any employment in which you can make use of them, you are more than welcome to them until my return."

"Thank you, sir! I am sure I can, and am more grateful than I can say for your kindness."

"It will not be necessary now for me to speak to Mrs. Flynn. You have taken that out of my hands," smiled Mr. Courtney. "I wish you every happiness in your married life."

"Thank you, sir, we will try to deserve it."

The next evening in the presence of the Courtneys, Mrs. Merryman, the delighted Norah, and a few of the villagers, the Rev. Carl Courtney performed the ceremony which made Mrs. Flynn Mrs. Sandy MacQuoid, much to the astonishment of Roy and Cecil, who had never suspected any love-mak-

ing between the dignified Mrs. Flynn and the more dignified Sandy.

As nothing remained to prevent, the following week saw Mr. Valentine Courtney upon the Atlantic, bound for he knew not and cared not where.

CHAPTER XII

JERUSHA FLINT AND HILDA

One favor stipulated by Fred, after his engagement to Hilda, was that she should answer his letters promptly when anything prevented his weekly visit to the farmhouse, and she promised.

At the commencement of this correspondence Fred ignored the title "cousin" in inditing and ending his epistles, and substituted "My Dearest Hilda," or "My Beloved Hilda," as the fancy of the moment dictated, and signed them "Your Devoted Fred." Her answering missives were guided by his letters, modified, however, by maidenly reserve, but at his request she ceased to address him as "cousin."

As the winter wore on, snows and rains and like excuses were utilized by Fred as preventing his weekly visits; and after the spring came and merged

into summer he made only fortnightly visits to the farmhouse, as was his custom before Hilda became a member of the home circle. His letters, however, came punctually and gave lively details of the social festivities in Springfield society. "Dear Hilda" appeared to be a sufficiently affectionate appellation in inditing these missives, and before the autumn came "Cousin Hilda" seemed to satisfy his surely waning affection.

A silent, but none the less attentive observer of all this was Mrs. Warfield, although she never saw or asked to see a line of the correspondence. But after Hilda's reception of a letter from Fred she failed to see the glow of pleasure which had illuminated the sweet face in the early days of the engagement; instead, a wounded, unsatisfied expression sat upon the sad lips and tried to hide itself in the depths of the pensive eyes.

One morning Hilda received her usual letter from Mrs. Merryman and one from Fred, brought from the village post-office by Ben Duvall. She hurried to her room to read them. Mrs. Warfield, who had gone to her own room adjoining, heard

her ascend the stairs, enter her room and close the door, and expected after time was given her to peruse them to hear her gentle tap upon her door Mrs. Merryman's letter in hand to read aloud, as was her custom. All remained silent for such a length of time that Mrs. Warfield had almost concluded that her eyes had deceived her, and Hilda had not received letters, when she heard her footsteps pause at the door.

"Come in, darling, I am here," she called, and Hilda came in slowly with Mrs. Merryman's letter open in her hand. A bright spot burned on either cheek, but it was evidently not caused by pleasure. There was a look of having shed tears, and when she took a low chair near Mrs. Warfield and read the letter her voice trembled, although she made an effort to steady it.

Mrs. Merryman's letter was long and interesting. Her former letters had informed Hilda of the absence of Mr. Valentine Courtney. This one mentioned the place of his sojourn in the old world as heard through Mrs. Courtney. It gave details of all the little happenings in Dorton and in its neigh-

borhood, and of affairs at "My Lady's Manor" under the management of Mrs. MacQuoid, as reported by Norah, and closed with the intelligence of the illness of Jerusha Flint.

Mrs. Warfield listened attentively to the letter from beginning to end, and thanked Hilda for giving her the pleasure of hearing it; at the same time she heard nothing to warrant the subdued excitement of the reader.

She was quite sure that it was not the illness of Miss Flint or Hilda would have made allusion to it. Moreover, her manner appeared to take more of anger than grief, and Mrs. Warfield felt assured in consequence that a letter had been received from Fred, and it was responsible for that anger.

As soon as Hilda finished she arose and returned to her own room.

"Aunt Sarah," she said a few minutes later, "do you wish anything from the village? I am going to the post-office."

"No, dear, I do not know of anything needed."

Hilda went to her room to put on her wraps, and

Mrs. Warfield, after a moment's reflection, laid aside her sewing and followed.

"My dear," she said, as Hilda opened the door for her, "if you are writing to Fred, I hope you will be careful what you write. He is very careless of his letters, and other eyes may see what you only intend for his. I do not seek to question into what should perhaps not concern me, but you appear a little different from your usual manner and I only wish to warn you."

The color left the face of the girl for a moment, and she leaned against her dressing-table for support.

"You are his mother," she said with tear-dimmed eyes. "Read what he says."

"I hope, my child, that you have not asked me to do this unless you are desirous that I should read it."

"I did not even imagine, five minutes ago, that I could ever allow anyone to see it; now I wish you to read it," and tears rolled down the pale cheeks.

Mrs. Warfield opened the sheet and glanced over the words:

"My Poor Little Hilda:

"No one could have convinced me half a year ago that I would address you, whom I then loved, to tell you that my feelings in regard to you have undergone a change. I am heartily ashamed of myself to have to acknowledge this, and no doubt you will be disappointed in me. Perhaps if I could have seen you oftener it might have been different. If I could know what my future sentiments toward you will be I would gladly tell you. I hope you will care a little because of this, but I do not wish you to grieve too much. Your Cousin Fred."

The flush which had arisen to the cheek of Hilda was eclipsed by the glow that spread over the face of Mrs. Warfield. She gave the letter back without a word, her eyes refusing to meet those of the girl standing before her.

"Will you read my answer?" asked Hilda, taking it from the envelope not yet sealed.

"If you wish it, my love."

"Yes, I would rather have you know the whole story."

Mrs. Warfield's face brightened into a smile as she read:

"Dear Cousin Fred:

"Yours received and I reply merely to advise you not to distress yourself fearing I will grieve. Why should I be disappointed in you, when it is exactly as I expected? I was favored with the experience of other girls, and as you will remember was not willing to engage myself to you, knowing your fickleness; but after you remained faithful a few weeks I was foolish enough to believe you in earnest, and for this I am heartily ashamed. I shall be in no danger of committing again the folly of believing it, so you need not trouble yourself to tell me 'your future sentiments.'

"Your Cousin Hilda."

Mrs. Warfield arose upon finishing the letter, and taking Hilda in her arms pressed a kiss upon the trembling lips.

"I feared you would not be willing to have me

send it," faltered Hilda, as tears for the sympathy received filled her eyes.

"Yes, send it, by all means, and the earlier the better. It will do Fred good to find that one girl, at least, is not so much in love with him as to withhold resentment for his unmanly fickleness."

Hilda put the letter in the envelope, sealed it and went out, and Mrs. Warfield returned to her room and took up her sewing.

"Without intending it, she has taken the very best way to retain him," she communed with herself. "She is a noble girl. Fred will rue this."

Bravely as Hilda had borne the trial, try as she might to conceal her wounded feelings, Mrs. Warfield, apparently unobservant, knew as time passed on that the reaction was harder to bear than the first knowledge of Fred's inconstancy.

Hilda had watched for his coming, the correspondence had been a stimulus in her uneventful life at the farmhouse, and when it ceased, in spite of her good sense and excellent judgment for one so young, she felt desolate and unsettled. She dreaded Fred's next visit home. How could she meet him under

these changed circumstances? What could she say to him, or he to her, under the piercing, satirical gaze of Mrs. Paul Warfield? And Mrs. Merryman —what would she think of it, she who was so glad to know that Hilda had such kind and loving friends in her new home?

It was a bitter trial to tell her, but Hilda's conscience would not allow her to leave that faithful friend in ignorance of how matters stood, and in the postscript to her next letter she said: "Dear Aunt Grace, the engagement between Cousin Fred and myself is broken."

That was all; she could not tell her now the cause, and was very sure that Mrs. Merryman would never ask.

Hilda was sincere in saying that she would not grieve. She read, she studied, practiced the most difficult of the pieces given her by Professor Ballini, and in other ways kept herself constantly employed; and Mrs. Warfield's motherly heart yearned toward her as if she were indeed her own loved daughter.

After a time Fred's letter set Hilda to analyzing the real state of her feelings toward him. She

loved him because, like the others of his family, he had been so kind to her. He was one of the best of sons, one of the most affectionate of brothers. She doubted if any girl could have helped becoming attached to one so handsome and attractive, if placed in his companionship as she had been.

Yet she realized that the affection she had cherished for him was unlike that which she had thought a woman's should be for the one who was to fill the place of protector and life-long companion; different, as she now discovered, from the affection she entertained for Mr. Courtney.

Yes, like a revelation it came to her in the quietude of her room that the feeling with which she regarded him was different from that felt for any other human being. She remembered his manly steadiness and strength of character; his protecting care of her and of everything feebler than himself; the repose and peace and contentment she always felt in his society. She remembered the last evening she passed at "My Lady's Manor," and tears filled her eyes as she thought of the loneliness that

reigned in the beloved library, now that he was far away.

She took the miniature portrait of Mr. Courtney from its velvet case and looked long and earnestly at it.

"He has not a superior," she said to herself; "he is noble and true and I love him and only him, though he may never think of me or see me again."

That afternoon Mrs. Lura invited Hilda to make parochial calls with her, after which she intended stopping at Uncle Herbert's store in the village to purchase material for her embroidery. She was proficient in all kinds of fancy work, and just at that time was exercised over the completion of a sofa pillow for a birthday gift for her father.

In the fancy line Uncle Herbert's stock was far from extensive at any time, and at that particular epoch was poor indeed, and Mrs. Lura was unable to obtain any of the shades of silk desired. Consequently she lost her temper and sharply reminded him that he ought to keep a store where customers could get at least a third of the articles called for,

or give it up that a more enterprising man might take his place.

Uncle Herbert laughed good-naturedly at this candid opinion, accompanied by a frown upon the fair brow and the flashing of brilliant black eyes, and informed her that he intended going to Philadelphia on the early morning train to purchase his half yearly supply of merchandise, and would be happy to get anything she needed.

Equanimity restored, Mrs. Lura made out a list which Uncle Herbert put carefully in his memorandum book, searchingly watched by Mrs. Lura, accompanied by the injunction not to forget until she came for the silks that it was there.

The errands all completed, they drove back to the farmhouse, at the entrance of which Mrs. Warfield met them, more disturbed than they had ever seen her.

"My love," she said taking Hilda's hand, "a telegram has just come from Dorton. Jerusha Flint is very ill; they think she cannot live, and she says she must see you, and you cannot go alone."

"Uncle Herbert is going to Philadelphia in the

morning," said Mrs. Lura promptly. "Hilda can go with him."

"That is an excellent opportunity," exclaimed Mrs. Warfield. "I will send immediately to the village and tell him that Hilda will meet him at the station in good time."

"Planchette and the carriage are yet at the gate," said Mrs. Lura, glancing through the window. "I will drive back and tell Uncle Herbert, although I wonder that Hilda is willing to trouble herself to visit one who treated her so unkindly as did Miss Flint. I should not go near her."

"I grieve to have Hilda leave us, but it is a duty. Miss Flint must have some important reason for wishing to see her. She has possession of the few articles of furniture which were my sister's, and she may wish to see her in regard to them; or she may wish to ask forgiveness for her cruelty. Be the reason what it may, she must have her wish granted, if possible."

Hilda passed the evening packing her trunk, and although she reproached herself that she could be glad to go from friends who were so tenderly kind,

and her conscience troubled her that she could not be more sorry for the cause that was calling her back to Dorton, in spite of her reasoning she could not help rejoicing over the prospective visit.

"I will see dear Aunt Merryman and all my Dorton friends," she said to herself with an exultant throb of her heart. "Besides, I shall miss seeing Cousin Fred."

The next morning Mrs. Lura, who had another commission for Uncle Herbert, took Hilda to the Woodmont station, where he had not arrived, much to her displeasure, for it was nearing train time and she prophesied that with his usual want of punctuality he would be left.

Just as she arrived at the stage of impatience as to be upon the point of driving to the village for him and giving him a piece of her mind, he came in sight, walking at his usual leisurely, dignified pace, and in a few minutes they were off and Mrs. Lura went home.

Uncle Herbert was a genial traveling companion, and Hilda enjoyed the trip thoroughly. He accompanied her to the Baltimore depot as soon as

they reached Philadelphia, and saw her on her way. Mr. Merryman's carriage met her at Dorton Station and conveyed her to the cottage of Jerusha Flint. And thus, without a moment's delay which could be avoided, Hilda stood again in one of the homes of her childhood.

Diana Strong was in attendance upon the invalid and welcomed Hilda warmly.

"How much you have grown!" she said softly. "I never would have thought that a person could improve so much in less than two years; you are really an elegant young lady."

"Is she very ill?" asked Hilda in the same tone, as she laid aside hat and gloves in the little sitting-room.

"She is at death's door. It appears that only her longing and hope of seeing you have kept her alive. She has something on her mind that troubles her, poor creature, and has fretted and worried to see you, and I had to get Mr. Merryman to telegraph for you to come."

"Hilda," moaned a feeble voice, "won't you come?"

"I am here," replied the young girl, passing into the room, and bending over the invalid. "Tell me what I can do for you, and it shall be done gladly."

And thus the two whose heredity and paths in life had so contrasted met for the last time upon earth.

"Forgive me, oh, forgive me for my cruelty to you!" implored the fast failing voice slowly and falteringly.

"I do forgive you, freely and fully, as I hope to be forgiven."

"I am almost gone," whispered Jerusha. "I was unjust to you as well as cruel. Your Aunt Ashley left—two letters—for you. I read them—and destroyed—one. All in the cottage—was—yours,—there was money—I kept—every penny—of it—safely for you. It—is with the—letter, and—her pen—in the—the—"

Eagerly as Hilda listened, she heard no more. Jerusha's lips were closed in death.

CHAPTER XIII

HILDA BY THE MERRYMAN FIRESIDE

Excepting Erma, who was growing into healthy, attractive young womanhood, Hilda found no change in the Merryman household.

Her room was just as she left it the morning she and Paul set out for Ohio. She was glad to be again in it, and was as tenderly welcomed to the home as if she were a beloved daughter, and dropped naturally into the place she had once filled.

Mrs. Courtney had forwarded Hilda's last letter to her brother Valentine, and had not expected to write so soon again; but having called to see Hilda the evening of her arrival, she could not forbear writing to him as soon as she reached home telling him of the unexpected call which had brought the young girl to Dorton, and speaking warmly of her beauty and the sweet dignity of her manner.

The day following that in which Jerusha Flint had been placed in her resting place in Dorton churchyard, Mrs. Merryman went with Hilda to visit the cottage abandoned by Diana Strong.

Following the rule adopted at the commencement of her occupancy, of renting by the year and paying in advance, Jerusha Flint, though in her grave, held, in a manner, possession of the cottage, so all remained as she had left it until Hilda could consult with Mrs. Warfield through the medium of letters.

With the exception of the desk, and a few small articles, there was nothing that she cared to keep; yet as all there was bequeathed to her by Mrs. Ashley, she did not wish to act unadvisedly.

The main object of her visit was to examine the writing desk in search of the papers and the ruby inlaid pen of which Jerusha had spoken.

"I wrote a letter to you with it, but did not send it, as Mr. Merryman, who called, said a telegram would be better," Diana Strong had told her the day she came. "I laid the pen back in the desk and while standing at the gate talking to Mr. Merryman I saw Jerusha rise from her bed, totter the few

steps to the desk, lock it and put the key under the pillow where we found it."

All searching for the papers was vain, but Hilda never passed the cottage that she did not examine the desk, believing there was a secret drawer that was baffling her search.

Her walks to "My Lady's Manor" were resumed, to the delight of Mrs. MacQuoid and Chloe, who made it a rule to have the library warm and bright when Hilda came.

Sometimes she remained only long enough to exchange books, but they had seen her, she had chatted with them, had petted the terrier, exchanged some words with Sandy and left all cheered by the visit.

One afternoon she extended her walk to Dorton post-office, intending to call at "My Lady's Manor" upon her return in order to get a volume which an adverse and scathing criticism had tempted her to read.

She was expecting a letter from Mrs. Warfield, and saw that she was not to be disappointed when the postmaster, with a benevolent smile, com-

menced looking over the mail in the Merryman box.

There was one for her, but not addressed in the feminine script of Mrs. Warfield, but in the bold, business hand of Fred.

She had not remembered that it was the fourteenth of February, and with trembling fingers opened it the moment she reached the seclusion of the library at "My Lady's Manor."

Fred's remorse for his fickleness had found relief in rhyme, and under the wing of St. Valentine he poured forth his plaint:

"Each sound hath an echo, like to like doth incline,
But where is the heart that respondeth to mine?
In sunshine and shade life is lonely and drear,
I call my beloved, but no answer I hear.
I seek my beloved as the dew seeks the flower,
As moonbeams seek stream, meadow, forest and bower.
Oh, sadly I wander o'er woodland and lea,
And muse on the one so far distant from me!
I question my fate, and try to divine
If Hilda, my loved one, will ever be mine.

But all, all is silent; I wander alone;
I hope against hope, for I know she is gone.
She is loved by another, his bride she will be
And all pleasures in life must seem hollow to me."

His reminiscences had a different effect upon Hilda from what he intended. They cheered and warmed her heart, it was true, but not for him. Kind-hearted and sympathetic as she was, the prospective hollowness of Fred's pleasures did not in the least disturb her serenity. Instead, the last two lines of his valentine held a prophecy which filled her heart with sweet content. In the loving arms of kind Destiny she had been fostered, and she had faith to believe that she would ever there repose. Fred's written words only confirmed what she in thought was beginning to cherish. She loved Valentine Courtney, and had the conviction that the time would come when he would think of her; for that time she would wait.

It was growing twilight, and folding her letter she left the library, and to her great pleasure saw

Archie sitting by the kitchen hearth, who spoke to her as he would have done had he seen her every day.

"Got any valentines yet, Miss Hilda?" asked Chloe. "You must not forgit that you is a valentine yer own self, that Archie done found in the snow."

"No, Chloe, I can never forget that good Archie saved my life on St. Valentine's day," replied Hilda, looking kindly upon the wanderer.

"Archie can find no more people in the snow; he has looked and looked for them," he said sadly.

"I suppose it is yourself that gets plenty of valentines, Miss Hilda," remarked Mrs. MacQuoid respectfully, gazing with admiration upon the fair girl.

"No, Mrs. MacQuoid, there is no prospect of my getting many," smiled Hilda.

"Archie wishes that he could bring one," said the old man. "He would find one in the snow if he could."

"Thank you, Archie, I am sure you would bring me a valentine if you could find one," and nodding

a cheery good-bye, Hilda ran down the steps of the porch and in a little while reached "Fair Meadow."

"Miss Hilda," said Norah, "Mr. Merryman had a message from his sister in Baltimore, saying that relatives from Boston on their way south for the winter are there to remain over night, and she would like Mr. and Mrs. Merryman to come there for supper, and they have gone."

"Very well, Norah; then you will please bring in the tea while I run up to my room to lay aside my wraps."

Hilda had worn a crimson cashmere dress to the village, a costume very becoming to her fair face; and, adjusting the soft lace about throat and wrists, she put on a filmy white apron with a pocket to accommodate the ball of some fleecy white knitting, and with it in her hand descended to the tea-room, which was very bright and cheery in the lamp and fire-light.

Hilda's brisk walk in the crisp air had made the simple meal very enjoyable, and as soon as Norah had again put the center-table in order, Hilda drew it closer to the hearth and was soon absorbed in her

book. Nothing disturbed the stillness of the room save the singing of the hickory wood blazing in the open grate, or the purring of the kitten upon the hearth.

At the same hour the household of "My Lady's Manor" was agreeably surprised at the unexpected arrival of Mr. Courtney; and his welcome home, so far as they were concerned, was all that could be desired.

But during his voyage across the Atlantic, and every reflective moment since, he had pictured a fair girlish face that he longed to see brighten at his coming, and had felt the clasp of a dimpled hand that was dearer to him than all else upon the broad earth.

"I hope you will not allow my coming to disturb you, Mrs. MacQuoid," he said kindly when both arose from their evening meal at his entrance. "Do you and Sandy finish your tea; I will chat with Archie a while and then rest in the library until it suits you to ring for me."

Archie had been asleep in his chair, but awoke at the sound of Mr. Courtney's voice and looked

up at the handsome, kind face with an appreciative smile.

"Archie is glad you are home; he has often been here, but could not see you," he said.

"Miss Hilda was here this afternoon, sir," said Mrs. MacQuoid. "She was reading in the library."

Mr. Courtney's heart thrilled with pleasure, and a smile illumined his countenance. He was now where she had lately been; the sweet consciousness of her presence made his home doubly dear.

While he was chatting with Archie and asking Mrs. MacQuoid for the welfare of Rev. Carl and family and the neighborhood in general, Sandy lighted the library lamp, drew the blinds, and wheeled Mr. Courtney's favorite chair before the grate.

"If we had knowed that Marse Val was comin'," remarked Chloe, after he had withdrawn to the library, "we could have had fried chicken and hot waffles, an' invited Mis' Emma an' Miss Hilda over, an' it would have been like ol' times."

"He knows we didn't expect him, Chloe, and I am sure this rich ham, and your beautiful white

rolls, and the sweet butter and honey will suit him," replied Mrs. MacQuoid as she placed glass and china for one upon the tea-table.

"He allus was that easy to please; never had no bother nohow with Marse Val, and Marse Carl an' Miss Emma. They is angels, that is certain sure."

"True for you, Chloe, and now if the coffee is ready, I will ring for the master."

"It's done ready, an' is the Simon-pure an' no mistake. Kitty done say, she did, that when Marse Val was a little fellah, he couldn't be humbugged when it come to coffee. He knowed the very fust sip that the culled folks' Rio wasn't the white folks' Mocha."

The meal appeared to suit Mr. Courtney perfectly. Refreshed in spirit by his sojourn in the library, his manner proved the return of hope. When he finished he again sought the library.

On his homeward journey he had read and reread Mrs. Courtney's two latest letters, received by the same mail—one telling him of the broken engagement, the other of Hilda's return to Dorton. They had found him lonely, restless, seeking for

happiness that change did not bring. After reading them he was, as it were, in another realm, and obeying a sudden impulse made haste to return to his native land, was now at "My Lady's Manor" in his favorite room. Alone and at leisure, he had time to reflect.

If, after all, his coming were fruitless, what had life to offer in compensation for his great disappointment? He reasoned that the broken engagement was, perhaps, the result of a misunderstanding which had been explained away, and the engagement renewed upon a firmer basis than before.

He called to mind that business alone had brought Hilda to Dorton. She had not come because she wished to see him or "My Lady's Manor," for she knew of his absence, and could have no knowledge as to when he would return.

If she loved Fred Warfield, this visit to Dorton would not weaken the attachment, nor would he wish it to do so; yet her return to Fred would leave him desolate, and "My Lady's Manor" a prison.

What presumption—he reflected—for one whose age was nearly double her seventeen years to hope

to win one so lovely! What advantage had he over the bright, buoyant beauty, the youthful companionship of Fred Warfield, except his wealth? And he knew Hilda's noble nature too well to believe for a moment that she would make of it the most remote object. He arose from his place by the hearth and walked to and fro in the quiet room.

The library door opened softly and Archie came in. "I want you!" he said, in a subdued, impatient tone. "I promised her. Come!"

Mr. Courtney made no response; mutely he obeyed, and swiftly and silently Archie led the way across the meadow to Mr. Merryman's. Taking neither path that led to the front entrance, he took his accustomed way, opened the tea-room door, and they stood in the presence of Hilda.

"I have brought you a valentine, but I could not find one in the snow," said Archie in a low tone. "Archie would have tried and tried, had there been any snow."

Hilda arose, a flush of joy illumined her sweet face, she advanced a step toward Mr. Courtney, then withdrew.

"She does not love me, Archie," said Mr. Courtney, noticing the action, "youth and loveliness can have no affinity with middle age."

"Please tell him, Archie," said Hilda, gently, "that youth trusts to middle age for faithful love and protection. Hair tinged with silver is beautiful in my eyes."

Mr. Courtney advanced eagerly and taking her hand in his pressed his lips upon it.

"Oh, Archie, dare I ask for this dear hand?"

"If he asks, Archie, it is his," said Hilda.

"But the heart, Archie? The hand is valueless to me unless the heart goes with it."

"Tell him, good Archie, that the heart has always been his, though part of the time it knew not its master."

"I feel as if in a dream," faltered Mr. Courtney; "an hour ago despairing, now filled with greater happiness than I had dared imagine."

"We owe our happiness to Archie. He has been my good genius from childhood. He is my mascot."

"I will make another effort to have him share our

home at 'My Lady's Manor'," said Mr. Courtney. "Your persuasion will, I think, prevail."

"Our home!" Hilda's heart thrilled at the sweet words. An orphan, homeless, save for the goodness of dear friends, she was now the promised wife of one who would protect and care for her as long as life was granted, one whom she could truly love and honor for his noble, tender and steadfast nature. How could she ever be grateful enough to God for His goodness to her?

"This is one of Archie's homes; Archie will stay till morning," and, passing into the kitchen, the old man, without so much as a word to the occupants thereof, went up to his room, leaving Norah and Perry amazed at his sudden appearance.

CHAPTER XIV

ARCHIE FINDS A PACKAGE

Mrs. Warfield was deeply grieved and disappointed that Fred had given Hilda cause to lose confidence in him so utterly, as she had given evidence in her letter to him. She had intended speaking plainly to him in regard to his heartless conduct, thinking it would influence him in his future companionship with Hilda, and was much disappointed that the summons came for her to return to Dorton before his next visit home.

Her resolutions, like many others depending upon circumstances, were put aside, for instead of setting out to chide she remained to comfort. Fred, for the first time in his life, was completely cast down. Ever since receiving Hilda's letter he had

been revolving in his mind what he would say when they met, in order to place himself upon the former basis.

The passage at arms had aided him, as it had Hilda, to define his feelings. He realized that he loved her, and this time, if never before, was in earnest. It was his intention to offer a humble apology, and to ask a place in her esteem with the eloquence of which he was master, and he did not believe that she would refuse.

His hopes received a blow when he came home and found her gone, and no time specified for her return. He could have shed tears in the bitterness of his soul, and Mrs. Paul Warfield, who suspected how matters stood, shook her shrewd head and agreed with herself that it served him right.

After sending the valentine he hoped to hear a word from Hilda, but in her letter to his mother no special mention was made of him, so he wrote to her imploring her to believe him sincere in his profession of affection for her, and asked for a line bidding him hope. Perry brought the missive from the village post-office and Norah took it to the parlor

where Hilda and Mr. Courtney were conversing by the early evening fire-light.

Hilda, with a deep blush, opened and read it and passed it to Mr. Courtney.

"I hope you don't think I expect this of you," he said gently. "Believe me, I have not a particle of jealous curiosity."

"No, sir, I gave it because I wish your advice in regard to answering it, and you could not give it unless you understood the whole affair. Aunt Sarah has also written to me, and says that Fred deplores his mistake and she hopes I will reconsider the matter, for she knows him to be sincere and pities him."

"It would be well to answer both letters immediately," remarked Mr. Courtney when he finished the perusal of Fred's letter. "It is far kinder to tell them the relation in which we stand to each other than to allow them to indulge a false hope."

"I do not mind telling Fred," replied Hilda, a flush very like anger coming into her face, "but I do feel sorry to grieve Aunt Sarah. She is as kind to me as an own mother, and I love her so dearly."

"I know it, but it will not be the task to write it

that it would be to tell them were you there. I should write at once to both."

"I will do as you advise. I can see that it is the kinder way."

"There is another favor I would ask of you, my dear one, and that is not to address me as 'sir.' It keeps the difference in our ages in very large figures before my eyes."

"I never thought of that," responded Hilda, laughing and blushing.

"I hope you will never feel under more restraint in my company than in that of Fred Warfield or any other person near your own age. I should be grieved to know that we were not in every way congenial and at home with each other."

"I never felt otherwise with you; you have always appeared young to me," said Hilda, sincerely.

"Thank you, my darling; I am truly glad to hear this. I have known two instances where the husband was double the age of his wife, and the lady in both cases seemed to be in awe of her husband. I would be miserable to know that you felt so toward me."

"You need not dread my being in awe of you," laughed Hilda. "You were somewhat younger than now when I first became acquainted with you. I suppose that accounts for my lack of deference. We have grown old together."

Mr. Courtney had suggested an early day for their marriage, and there was nothing to prevent except the item of a trousseau, a subject which Hilda, penniless, and having no claim upon a human being, did not consider open for discussion.

Mr. Courtney believed that to be the cause of her reluctance to agree to his suggestion for an early day, and had he not appreciated her fine nature so thoroughly, might have been tempted through the aid of Mrs. Courtney, to do away with that hindrance. As it was, he could only await Time's adjustment.

Hilda wrote to Mrs. Warfield and to Fred and waited for the second time in her life with keen anxiety for Mrs. Warfield's reply. Would she be wounded because Hilda remained indifferent to the united appeal of mother and son? Would she resent the reticence of Hilda in not giving them

knowledge of her attachment to Mr. Courtney in the nearly two years she had been with them and thus misleading Fred?

Smothering the pain in her heart, Mrs. Warfield's letter was candid, cordial and affectionate. She wrote nothing that would mar the happiness of the girl whom she held blameless. She offered her sincere congratulations, and added to the measure of her kindness by enclosing a check for the purchase of a handsome outfit as a wedding present.

There was now nothing to prevent Hilda from acceding to Mr. Courtney's wish to appoint an early day for the marriage, which would be at the home of the Merrymans, Rev. Carl officiating, and the bridal tour followed by a reception at "My Lady's Manor" under the auspices of Mrs. Courtney and Mrs. Merryman.

As upon a former occasion, Mrs. Courtney offered her assistance in the matter of shopping, and the offer was accepted gladly by Hilda.

The evening before they were to drive to Baltimore, Mrs. Merryman and Hilda took a walk to the cottage, and upon reaching the gate saw Archie

coming down the road from "My Lady's Manor," where he had been the past night and day.

"I am sure he is on his way to 'Fair Meadow,'" said Mrs. Merryman. "Ask him to wait and go with us; he can carry the things you wish to take."

Archie was willing to oblige and followed them up the grass-grown path. He sat down upon the door-step while the ladies went inside and opened the windows, letting in the soft evening air, laden with the odors of early spring.

As upon former visits, Hilda went to the desk, let down the lid and searched through the small drawers and other receptacles, but found nothing, and was about to lock it again when the old man entered and stood beside her.

"Archie knows where there is money," he said abruptly.

"No, Archie," said Hilda, "we have searched several times and can find nothing."

"But Archie knows it is there. Archie saw the woman put it in there one night when he was looking for people in the snow."

"Where is it, Archie?" asked Hilda, trying to

conceal her eagerness, knowing it would confuse him.

"In that tall box," pointing to the desk.

"There is no money there, Archie," said Mrs. Merryman. "We have looked for it several times."

"Archie can find it; he saw the woman put it there. Archie was looking through a crack in the shutter. The woman didn't know Archie saw her," he added earnestly.

"Show us where it is, Archie," said Hilda; "take your own time."

He stepped to the desk, put up the lid, lowered it again, and stood contemplating it with a look of perplexity upon his worn face.

"Archie forgets. He must think," he said. He locked and unlocked the desk several times, the ladies sitting quietly by.

"Yes, Archie knows!" he cried exultantly. "The woman held the lid so, and put her hand under here," and suiting the action to the word, he drew forth a small flat package and gave it into the hand of Hilda. It was addressed to her. She opened it and found Mrs. Ashley's letter, the money, a letter

from Jerusha Flint to her and the gold pen with its holder set with rubies.

Pale and silent, Hilda held them, her eyes brimming with tears. It seemed almost as if her aunt had returned to hold converse with her, and that poor Jerusha was yet craving forgiveness, though "after life's fitful fever," she was at rest in the grave.

"Hilda," ran the letter, "I was cruel to you, and can never atone for that, but I give back all I kept from you. I did not intend to keep the pen, but forgot to send it with the trunks, and then, wishing to have no communication with you, put off sending it. I have used it twice, there being no other pen in the house. The first time was in writing my letter to Mrs. Merryman to keep you. You did not return, and I looked upon the pen as bringing me good luck. Diana told me that she used it in writing to Mrs. Warfield; you found a home with her, which I regarded as better luck, for it took you out of my sight. I directed an envelope to my brother Horace with it, enclosing three letters. One was my mother's letter to me, received on my

sixteenth birthday. The other two I requested Horace to forward to our grandfather after I am gone, and I wish him joy in reading my mother's letter to him from Baltimore, and his reply. I also enclosed for Horace a slip cut from a London newspaper years and years ago, by my grandmother, which confirmed the record of our ancestry and heredity given in my mother's letter to me.

"That letter from my mother served to keep in remembrance my miserable childhood. Her pride of ancestry kept her from allowing me to associate with the plebeian children of the neighbors, among whom our poverty-stricken homes were compelled to be, and to add to my half-starved, and in winter, half-frozen condition, I was shut up with her sighs and tears, her heart-sick waiting for forgiveness and help from her father which never came, and her unavailing regret for her disobedience to him and to her mother, which was the cause of all her troubles.

"My sleep was broken, my nerves wrecked; and I imagined and dreamed of all kinds of terrible calamities which we were powerless to escape. When

my mother died, I was taken to an orphan asylum, which I hated from foundation to roof; and when old enough to earn my living was compelled to earn it by means of an occupation I despised.

"I mention these things as some little excuse for my warped disposition which made me so disagreeable to my fellow-creatures that I had not one real friend, and was so cruel to you that I wonder you lived. For that I implore your forgiveness.

"JERUSHA."

"Poor Jerusha looked upon this pen as a mascot," remarked Hilda, taking it up to examine it after finishing the letter. "Oh, Aunt Merryman, how could I bear resentment toward her after reading this story of her life?"

"Yes, we should be patient with our fellow creatures. We cannot know the burdens that many of them are bearing. I have often wondered what trials poor old Archie has had to bring him to the condition he is in now, for he has evidently seen better days."

"I have often said that Archie is my good genius. Besides saving my life, it seems that through him,

guided by a kind Providence, I have found three beautiful homes, and now through him this package has been found."

"Did you ever see anything so capable of keeping a secret as is this desk?" commented Mrs. Merryman. "Let us examine it more closely."

"How simple when one understands it!" said Hilda, raising and lowering the lid. "The desk has a false bottom to which the lid is attached by hinges not placed at the end, but a short distance above it. Thus, when we put up the lid it closes the secret space, and when the desk is open—that is, the lid down and resting upon the open drawer beneath it—it is concealed."

"It is the greatest curiosity in the shape of a desk that I have seen," commented Mrs. Merryman. "Who would suspect a vacancy under what they suppose to be the floor of the desk, large enough to hold a larger package than yours? In truth, several of that thickness could be concealed there if laid side by side."

"But the hiding place is easily seen if one knows that the secret lies in holding the lid in a horizontal

position; but being always under it, and the entrance to the secret nook being partly filled in by the lower end of the lid, it is sure to elude detection."

"It eluded ours, and Archie was puzzled, although he had seen it."

"It cannot be seen except at the moment that someone is raising or lowering the lid," remarked Hilda, experimenting, "and then only by an observing person who was standing where a side view of the desk could be had, as did Archie. When the desk is closed it conceals the false floor; when it is open it conceals the real one."

"But you and I are as intelligent as most persons," said Mrs. Merryman, reflectively. "How is it that we could not find out the secret of that desk as did Jerusha Flint? She said in her letter that she had used the pen, and yet we find it with her letter in the secret nook. Who told her how to find it?"

"The information must have been in the letter she destroyed. She feared it would fall in other hands."

"Yes, I am sure you are right," answered Mrs. Merryman.

"It is no wonder that she longed to see me," continued Hilda. "I wish for her sake that I had reached here in time to listen to all she wished to say."

They arose, locked the desk and the cottage door, and, followed by Archie with the basket, went home, Hilda carrying the package which had been kept so long from its rightful owner.

Since her return to Dorton she had gone several times to the village churchyard to visit the grave of her Aunt Ashley—on which Mrs. Warfield had long before ordered to be placed a handsome memorial stone—and never left it without evincing her forgiveness by pausing at that of Jerusha Flint.

The wish had been in her heart to mark that lowly mound by a headstone, however small and plain—a greater longing than she had ever felt for any acquisition for herself. Now the way was opened, and the next day she made it part of her errand to the city to visit the marble yard where Mrs. Warfield's order had been faithfully executed,

and order one of snow-white marble bearing only the carved words—"Jerusha Flint."

Invitations to the wedding reception at "My Lady's Manor" were sent to the four members of the Warfield family, but Mrs. Warfield and Fred sent a courteous regret, promising to visit Hilda at some future time.

"They will never come," commented Hilda, after reading the letter aloud to Mr. Courtney. "Fred will not wish to come, and Aunt Sarah would not travel so far unless Fred or Paul accompanied her."

"After we are settled in our home we will invite them again," said Mr. Courtney, "and if they are kept in ignorance of my knowledge of the engagement between you and Mr. Warfield it will save them embarrassment."

"I shall never tell them unless they ask, and I scarcely think they will mention it to us, or to anyone."

Mrs. Lura purposed making her annual visit to her uncle Robert De Cormis and his family in Philadelphia about that time, and Paul accompanied

her there, and to the reception at "My Lady's Manor."

Upon her return to Ohio she discanted so volubly upon the beauty of the bride, the elegance of the bridegroom, and the grandeur of their home when in the presence of Fred that Mrs. Warfield was constrained to think that the chief pleasure she took in the visit was the opportunity it gave her to embarrass him.

Mrs. MacQuoid and Chloe were rejoiced that the home had a mistress, and that mistress, Hilda, and Sandy, who had resumed his position as coachman as soon as Mr. Courtney returned from Europe, was more than satisfied, and drove the iron-grays to town and back happier than a king.

Mr. and Mrs. Valentine Courtney made an effort to induce Archie to give up his wanderings and remain with them, but to all inducements he made the same reply, "No, Archie has plenty of homes; he must walk about to find people in the snow."

"My Lady's Manor" was a charming visiting place to the young people of the neighborhood, and to no one more so than to Erma Merryman, who

looked upon it as a second home, and upon Hilda as a loved sister.

One morning, about two years after Hilda had taken up her residence there, Mr. Courtney came into the nursery with an open letter in his hand. The king of that small realm was Valentine Courtney, Jr., a healthy, handsome boy, "just as good as he is handsome," being the opinion of each and all who saw him.

"I think I have a pleasant surprise for you, dear," said Mr. Courtney, taking the infant upon his knee and looking with loving admiration upon mother and child.

"I am not easily surprised, but have my share of woman's curiosity. What is it?" smiled Hilda.

"Judge Sylvester happened to mention to me some time ago that he wished a partner in his law business and preferred a young man. I thought immediately of Fred, and as Sylvester appeared willing to have me write to him, I did so, remembering that Mrs. Warfield said in one of her letters that he wished to go into partnership with an established firm. Fred answered promptly, and the re-

sult is that he is coming to Baltimore and we will have him near us."

"That was so kind and thoughtful in you; Aunt Sarah will appreciate it," said Hilda, gratefully.

"I have been wishing to do them some favor that they would accept, in return for their kindness to you, and am glad that this was acceptable."

Hilda wrote that evening to Mrs. Warfield, inviting her to come with Fred and make a long visit, a request with which Mrs. Warfield gladly complied.

Thus before a month passed Fred Warfield was established as partner with Judge Sylvester in Baltimore, and Mrs. Warfield was at "My Lady's Manor," where her son was always a welcome guest.

CHAPTER XV

HILDA'S HOME

Five happy years had passed since Hilda had become the cherished wife of Mr. Courtney, and during those years Mrs. Warfield had spent two winters at "My Lady's Manor," and was there for the third. She was expecting to return to her Ohio home, for spring had again made the earth jubilant with the song of birds and fragrant with the perfume of flowers.

Although no confidences were solicited or given upon the subject, Hilda knew that her beloved guest was happier during these visits than at any other time since Paul's marriage, because away from the domineering presence of Mrs. Lura, who was growing more like Jerusha Flint every year of her life.

No childish voices disturbed the quietude of the farmhouse; perfect order reigned, and Mrs. Lura

could devote all the time she wished to embroidery, the chief pleasure of her existence.

There were many reasons for the sojourn at "My Lady's Manor" being pleasant to Mrs. Warfield, not the least of which was having Fred so near, a lawyer in good position, popular in society as he had been in Springfield, and, as was characteristic, falling in love with every beautiful face new to him.

Mr. Courtney invited him frequently to pass the night with them, taking him back to his office in the morning; and Fred thought, as had Hilda years before, that nothing was more enjoyable than the drive in a luxurious carriage drawn by a span of handsome, spirited horses.

Then Mrs. Warfield was always happy in the company of children, and believed that no better or handsomer boy could be found than the small Valentine; and the dainty blue-eyed darling—Sarah Warfield Courtney—was, in her eyes, the perfection of infantile beauty and excellence.

Another tie which bound her to Hilda and Hilda's home was the articles which had belonged to Mrs. Ashley; and she passed some time each day in the

room containing them; relics hallowed by the touch of the lovely and beloved young sister.

She loved the neighborhood of Dorton and its people; she and Mrs. Carl Courtney were congenial in every way, were members of the same denomination, and although both were too broad-minded to be rigidly sectarian, it was a dear tie that attached them to each other.

Her visit, however, was nearly finished, and she was making preparations to return to Springfield, when she received a letter from Mrs. Lura, eminently characteristic of that managing little matron. It read:

"Dear Mother—I think you will be surprised to hear of a change made in our household arrangements. Father has always been lonely since I married and left him, and it occurred to me that it would save me much time and trouble going back and forth if I could have him with us. So he has given up the parsonage, and as he has always been accustomed to a large front room with southern exposure, and where sunlight comes in freely, I have given him yours, which, being just across the

hall from Paul's and mine, I think suits him well, and I am sure you should be satisfied with the one back of it, as Angie tells me you used it the summer that Mrs. Lacy and two other visitors were at the farmhouse, so you must have preferred it.

"Believing that you cannot fail in agreeing to this, I remain

"Your affectionate daughter,

"LURA WARFIELD."

After receiving this epistle it appeared to be a suitable time for Mr. and Mrs. Courtney to again urge their loved friend to remain with them, and as that letter seemed to be the only thing required to make her decide, she agreed to stay.

They all had occasion to rejoice that she had thus decided, for the next week after she had appointed to go to Ohio, little Valentine was ill of scarlet fever, and Mrs. Warfield, who loved the boy as if he were of her own flesh and blood, was, next to Hilda, his devoted nurse.

"'Pears like ter me, Kitty," said Andy one morning when the dangerous symptoms were at their height, "dat Marse Val didn't seem chipper dis

mornin' when he com'd over to see Marse Carl an' Mis' Emma; has yer took notice to it, Kitty?"

"Marse Val never looked handsomer than he did this yer mornin'," replied Kitty, decidedly.

"I didn't say nothin' 'bout handsome, Kitty!" exclaimed Andy irately. "I done said he wan't so chipper. I don't like dat pale face, Kitty; 'tain't for no good, min' dat."

"I may as well tell you, Uncle Andy," said Kitty, hesitatingly, "that Chloe told me all about it; she was in de china closet when Mis' Emma was over dar yistady, and heard her an' Mis' Warfield talkin'. De doctor comes twice a day to see little Marse Valentine and little Mis' Sarah; dey has de scarlet fever, an' Dr. Lattinger is afeard dat little Marse Valentine won't live."

"Well! well! well!" cried Andy, shaking his white head, and brushing away a tear with the back of his wrinkled hand, "I's nearly a hundred years ol', an' has toted Marse Val in my arms when he was a chipper baby. I done lubed dat chile like I lubed my own chillen, an' now can't help him none in his trouble."

"We must all have trouble in dis world, Uncle Andy."

"I know dat, but de good Lord won't shorely take little Marse Val an' leave me who ain't no 'count nohow. I's like a withered apple on a dead branch, dat no wind nor frost nor hail kin fotch down from offen de tree."

"Chloe told me that Dr. Lattinger says much depends on de nursin', and dey has good nurses. I tell you that it is a mighty good thing Mis' Hilda has dat Ohio lady to call on in time of trouble."

"'Pears ter me yer knows a heap dis mornin', Kitty," remarked Andy dryly. "'Spose yer was 'tendin' to keep all dis from de ol' man."

"No, Uncle Andy, but Mis' Emma said it was better not to tell you unless you asked, for it would only distress you, for you think so much of Marse Val."

"Of course I does, Kitty, but nobody wants to be kep' in de dark, yer knows dat yer own self! Ol' folks wants ter know what is goin' on, an' how is dey ter know widout somebody tells 'em?"

"I will tell you all I know, Uncle Andy," said

Kitty remorsefully, as the old man took out a remnant of plaid handkerchief to dry his tears. "What do you want to know next?"

"Whar did de chillen catch de feber?"

"Dr. Lattinger says it is in de atmosphere."

"Is dat sumpin' to eat or drink, Kitty?"

"No, it is the air."

"Den why couldn't he say de air? Oh, 'twill be mighty hard for Marse Val to part wid dat little boy and gal. Dey is de light of his eyes."

"But maybe he won't have to part wid dem, Uncle Andy," said Kitty, cheerfully, "and de sorrow of a night will be forgot in de joy of de mornin'."

"But I am afeard dey'll be taken, Kitty," sighed the old man tearfully. "I ain't axed my heavenly Marster to let me lib a little longer, not sense I had seen Marse Val so happy in dem chillen, but I suttenly wants to lib now; an' if dey is taken I hope de good Lord will spare ol' Andy to comfort Marse Val."

Andy was spared this grief, for to the joy of many hearts the children recovered; and when the balmy summer weather came were well enough to

enjoy many pleasant drives over the shady country roads.

Hilda, though favored with efficient helpers, lived far from an idle, aimless life, for her days were filled with good works. The plans originated by Mr. Courtney for promoting the temporal and spiritual welfare of his fellow creatures were heartily seconded by her; she was in every way a helpmeet.

Time passed speedily and happily in their home, varied by visits from friends from the city and the neighborhood, one of the best loved being Erma Merryman. She had returned from her school in Baltimore, a cultured and accomplished young lady, cherished by the home circle and admired in society.

Fred, in his frequent visits to "My Lady's Manor," saw, admired, and as was his wont, fell in love with her which impelled Hilda to have a serious talk with him.

"Erma is a sweet, confiding girl," she said, "and if you are only intending to flirt with her I consider it my duty to warn her and her parents that their confidence in you is misplaced; for you will leave her for the next pretty face you see."

"Oh, Cousin Hilda, please don't prejudice them against me! I am really in earnest this time."

"So you always say. Fred, what does make you so fickle and inconsistent?"

"Absence, Cousin Hilda."

"Absence! Oh, shame. What style of husband would you make when you so easily forget a loved one when separated for a time?"

"But the case would be entirely different, if the lady were my wife. Never fear, Cousin Hilda. If I am fortunate enough to win Miss Erma Merryman you will see me one of the best of husbands; you will be proud of me yet."

"Listen, Fred; you and your family have been dear, kind friends to me; but so, also, have been Uncle and Aunt Merryman, and it would distress me beyond measure to have them made unhappy through you."

"But I will not give them unhappiness; instead, I wish to give them a son-in-law first-class in every respect. Do, Cousin Hilda, lend a helping hand by speaking a good word for me."

"No, sir; I will do nothing of the kind. Making

or breaking matrimonial engagements is something at which my conscience rebels; and if ever I should be tempted to aid in that line, it certainly would not be for one so unsettled in the affections as yourself."

Fred laughed in his usual amiable and light-hearted manner, but Hilda was too much disturbed to smile.

"It was never excusable in you, Fred, even with youth on your side; but at your age it is positively culpable. You will lose the respect of all right-minded people, for if there is a person who merits ridicule, it is a light-headed, trifling old beau."

"But Cousin Hilda, how can I convince you that I am in earnest this time? I really love Miss Erma and intend asking her to be my wife."

"No doubt; but unless you give me your word of honor, as a gentleman, that you will not trifle with the affections of that lovely girl, but will keep your word, Mr. Courtney and myself will not consider you worthy of respect, and our home will be closed against you."

"I do give you my word of honor as a gentle-

man that I will ask Erma Merryman to be my wife; and if she accepts, will ask the very earliest time that she will agree to for our marriage, and will not make the least effort to break the engagement though the face of an houri should tempt me. Will that satisfy you, Cousin Hilda?"

"Yes, and no one will rejoice more than I to see you happily married; and you cannot fail in happiness if your wife be Erma Merryman."

The evening that Hilda and Fred had this conversation Erma received a letter from Anita Appleton, a school friend in Hagerstown, accepting the cordial invitation given her by Erma the week before, to pass a month at the Merryman farmhouse.

She had scarcely finished the perusal of it when Fred called and was told of the expected visitor, and innocent satisfaction beamed in her gentle face when she noticed that his brow grew clouded, and the smile left his lips.

"You do not seem glad, Mr. Warfield," she said. "I am sure you will be pleased with her. She is not only very beautiful, but is lovely in disposition. She is accomplished and witty; very different from me,

which is, I suppose, my reason for loving her more than any girl in the school in Baltimore."

"I am glad for your sake, Miss Erma, but not for my own. I wish only your society," he said, taking her small, white hand in his, "not only for the evenings of the coming month, but for all time. I came to ask you to be my wife," and accustomed as was Fred to making proposals of marriage, his voice trembled with apprehension as to the answer.

Erma's face flushed, then paled, and she remained silent; a silence which Fred misconstrued.

"I am aware that it was my duty to have first asked your parents' consent, but you have given but little encouragement that you cared for me, and now this expected visitor has unsettled my plans."

Erma was still silent; she seemed to be collecting her thoughts for an answer.

"Promise me that you will be my wife; promise now, before a stranger steps in to prevent us being alone together! If you will consent, I will seek the consent of your father and mother before I leave this evening."

"I must have time to consider," said Erma; "you cannot expect me to take such an important step without reflection, or consultation with papa and mamma."

"But you can certainly give me some hope, or appoint some early date when you can give me your decision!"

"Yes, I will appoint a time," she said, gently. "When Anita's visit is over, if you ask me again I will give you my decision. There is no need to speak to papa and mamma in regard to it; their only wish is for my happiness. They could say no more to you than I have already done, and I am sure that they will give free and full consent to any choice I may make."

"But I would be so much happier if you would promise me now, so much more settled in mind than if kept in suspense for more than a month."

"The time will soon pass, and we must bend all our thoughts toward making Anita's visit pleasant. We will take her out driving and on horseback. Cecil Courtney would, I think, help make a party of four for many a pleasant expedition."

"Then Cecil must be her escort; I will not give you up to him!" said Fred, his face flushing warmly.

"We will not consult our own pleasure," replied Erma, gently. "Whatever will be most agreeable to Anita for the short time she will be here must be our pleasure. I only hope that you will assist in entertaining her by coming as many evenings as you can."

"There is nothing to prevent my coming from Baltimore every evening with Mr. Courtney; you know that I have a standing invitation to 'My Lady's Manor.' Mr. Courtney is glad to have my company in the drive out and back to the city."

"I know it; Mr. Courtney loves you as he would an own brother."

Early the following week Miss Appleton came, was cordially welcomed by the Merrymans, and proved to be one of the most agreeable of guests, a brilliant, attractive creature, with whom every member of the family felt at home from the moment she crossed the door sill, and whose cheery presence seemed to pervade the whole house.

Anita had perfect taste in dress; and every article

of her artistic and elegant wardrobe was becoming to her. More than once, the very first evening in the parlor of the Merryman home, where several young people were congregated in honor of her arrival, Erma saw Fred's glance rest upon the beautiful face of her friend, and then upon hers, and she read his thoughts as correctly as if they were spoken words.

"Bird of Paradise and gentle dove," he had said in a low tone to her, and she had the intuition that "Bird of Paradise" was the ideal of the spoiled favorite of society, and not the sober plumaged dove.

Cecil Courtney was more than pleased to act as escort to one of the girls, and, seeming to prefer Erma, Fred did not object; so after the first drive and horseback expedition, all fell naturally into the places which they had filled the beginning of the visit.

Fred made no secret of his preference for the companionship of Anita, and soothed his conscience with the thought that he had been solicited by Erma to help entertain her friend, and she surely

could not be so unjust as to feel aggrieved that he had taken her at her word.

The visit was over and Anita returned to her home, and Fred, true to the letter of his request, and his promise to Hilda, called to hear Erma's decision.

"I have concluded that we are not at all suited to each other, Mr. Warfield," said Erma when he again made his offer of marriage.

A swift look of relief crossed Fred's expressive features, and any lingering idea that he really cared for her fled from Erma's mind.

The next day she went to take tea at "My Lady's Manor," and Hilda rejoiced at heart that she was not a love-lorn damsel, but was, as usual, bright and cheerful.

"Fred seemed pleased with your friend Anita," remarked Hilda as the two were seated in the shaded veranda while Mrs. Warfield and the children were taking their afternoon rest.

"Not pleased only, but captivated. He is certainly in love now, if never before."

"But Erma, dear, if you care for Fred, was it

wise to invite your beautiful friend to visit you at this time?"

A smile, as if the question had called up some pleasant remembrance, hovered upon the lips of Erma, and Hilda's heart grew so light that she laughed gleefully.

"Tell me, my Erma," she said, assuming a tragic air, "pour out the secrets of that heart into my faithful bosom."

"I will, oh friend of my childhood!" laughed Erma; then with tears of feeling in her eyes she added, "Oh, Hilda, how grateful I am every hour since Anita's visit that I was willing to agree with papa and mamma's advice to invite her to visit me at this time."

"The advice of Uncle and Aunt Merryman?" exclaimed Hilda in surprise.

"Yes, I had told them of Mr. Warfield's flippant manner of speaking of his broken engagements, and they trembled for my happiness should I become his wife. That was our reason for inviting Anita at this time and the result is just as we expected."

"And you are not crushed by the blow? Ah, Erma, dear, someone has taken possession of that gentle heart of yours."

Erma's downcast eyes and flushing cheeks confirmed her in this opinion in advance of the artless words, "Yes, Hilda, I compared him with Cecil Courtney, and he dwindled into insignificance beside that manly, reliable friend that I have known from babyhood. And oh, Hilda, Cecil has always cared for me and I did not know it! Nor did I know until Anita's visit that I cared for him."

"I congratulate you both from my heart; but Erma, dear, there is another side of the question to be considered. Was there not danger of your friend Anita becoming attached to Fred? You cannot deny that he is handsome and agreeable."

"I told her that he was a known trifler, and she was not many evenings in his society until she saw that my opinion was correct. She went away perfectly fancy free, so far as Fred was concerned. I cannot answer for him."

Erma had not long to wait to hear how Fred fared, for Anita's second letter informed her that

he had written an offer of marriage which she declined for two reasons, one being that she could not respect a man who so trifled with the affections, and the other, that after her return she promised herself in marriage to a young man worthy in every respect, absence proving that they were all in all to each other.

Winter, with its sleighing parties and other amusements, brought the young people together frequently, and Cecil Courtney was always Erma's escort, both their families, the Lattingers, and in truth the whole neighborhood approving highly of the prospective union.

Thus the months passed, and one sweet June morning a company of dear friends were gathered in the parlor of the Merryman farmhouse to witness the marriage, after which the newly-made husband and wife went upon a wedding journey and then took up their residence in Baltimore, as happy a young couple as could be found in "Maryland, My Maryland."

The evening of the wedding day Hilda and the children took one of their favorite walks to Dorton

churchyard, and while the little ones, under the care of Chloe, gathered wild flowers that dotted the grassy enclosure, Hilda went to the resting place of Jerusha Flint.

When she reached the spot she was surprised to see a lady beside it, and more so to find in her no stranger, but Mrs. Robert De Cormis, of Philadelphia, the aunt, by marriage, of Mrs. Lura Warfield.

"No wonder that you are surprised to see me, my dear," she said, as Hilda greeted her cordially. "I am on my way to your house to pass the night with you, if agreeable to you to entertain me at this time. The postmaster at Dorton pointed out 'My Lady's Manor,' but I took a circuit from the direct way in order to visit this churchyard."

"Nothing would give us greater pleasure than to have you with us, Mrs. De Cormis. Shall we walk, or would you prefer that I send Chloe to have the carriage come for us?"

"I prefer walking this lovely evening, and we can converse on our way. I came from Philadelphia this morning, and stopped off in Baltimore in order to see Horace Flint, the brother of Jerusha

Flint. He had forwarded letters to our address which was the reason for my coming. My dear, do you know that Jerusha was my husband's niece, the daughter of his only sister?"

"His niece!" echoed Hilda, halting to look into the face of Mrs. De Cormis; "his sister's daughter! Then she was first cousin to Lura Warfield, wife of Cousin Paul."

"Yes, her own cousin; Lura's father and Jerusha's mother were brother and sister."

"Lura Warfield has no knowledge of it, I am sure. I have every reason to know that she never heard of Jerusha Flint until she became acquainted with me," commented Hilda.

"No, I am sure of it. My husband never heard of Jerusha until we received the letter from her brother—Horace De Cormis Flint—which Jerusha requested should be forwarded to her grandfather. The letter proved itself, having been written by Jerusha's mother—my sister-in-law, long since dead; and enclosed in it was my father-in-law's reply."

"But I cannot understand it," exclaimed Hilda

in bewilderment. "Jerusha died several years ago. Why were not her mother's and her grandfather's letters forwarded at that time to your husband, Mr. Robert De Cormis, instead of waiting until now?"

"Horace Flint gave the excuse that as he and his sister Jerusha had lived until past middle age without any acquaintance with their mother's relatives he should never have made himself known were it not for the request of Jerusha."

"I never saw Horace Flint," remarked Hilda. "He may never have lived in this neighborhood, or if so, must have left it before my remembrance."

"He did not mention how long he has lived in Baltimore, but just incidentally mentioned that Jerusha's home was with him until she rented the cottage where a lady lived whose name was Ashley."

"It is so surprising that I can as yet scarcely comprehend it," said Hilda.

"It was the same to me, and the perusal of the two letters sent by request of Jerusha was a great grief to my husband. I will tell you of them.

"The mother of Jerusha and Horace Flint was

the only daughter of Father De Cormis, and was several years older than her two brothers—Rev. Horace De Cormis, of Woodmont, Ohio, and Robert De Cormis, my husband.

"She was beautiful, but self-willed, and in spite of the threats of her father and the entreaties of her mother persisted in receiving the attentions of a young man named Archibald Flint, who was visiting Philadelphia from San Francisco.

"He was handsome, cultured and amiable, but without knowledge of business of any kind.

"To break off this intimacy Miss De Cormis was sent to a distant boarding school. Mr. Flint followed, she eloped and they were married, and for several years her parents heard no word of them. Not knowing that during this time her mother had died, and being in abject poverty, Mrs. Flint wrote to her parents from her poor home in Baltimore, beseeching them for the sake of her little daughter, Jerusha—named for Mother De Cormis—to send relief.

"My father-in-law was a man of implacable temper; he wrote commanding her never to communi-

cate with him again. He reproached her as being the cause of her mother's death, and added that her ingratitude and disobedience to her parents was being visited upon her children. He concluded his letter by saying that he disowned her as a daughter, had disinherited her, and had commanded his young sons, Horace and Robert, under the same penalty, never to see her or communicate with her in any way.

"In this letter he returned the one she had written; and these were the two letters which Jerusha had requested her brother Horace to send their grandfather; but he being years before in his grave, we, who are living in his old home, received them."

"Poor Jerusha had these letters,—her mother's to grieve over, and her grandfather's to sour her against the world," sighed Hilda. "Her poor young mother was severely punished for her disobedience. I wonder how long she lived after receiving that letter?"

"It must have been several years, for Horace Flint mentioned in our conversation to-day that Jerusha was ten years of age and he was six, when,

after the death of their mother, they were taken by their father to the orphan asylum."

"I wonder what became of the father?" questioned Hilda.

"We always supposed that he died years ago, our reason for thinking so being a letter found among the papers left by Father De Cormis. It was written to him by a nurse in the hospital in Baltimore, saying that a man was lying there dangerously ill of brain fever, and in his pocket they had found a letter which, being addressed to Father De Cormis, the nurse had written to enclose it. But Horace informed me to-day that his father recovered."

"I wonder if Mr. De Cormis gave any attention to the letter of the nurse?" questioned Hilda.

"I think not, nor to the one Archibald enclosed in it, which was so pathetic in its appeal that, so well as I knew my father-in-law, I wondered that he could steel his heart against it.

"It was written at the bedside of his sick wife, and in it Father De Cormis was implored to send relief to the suffering woman and her little chil-

dren. The writer added that he was ill, and exhausted from watching, and from a long walk of several miles to ask assistance of his brother-in-law, Joshua Farnsworth, of 'My Lady's Manor,' who was willing and able to assist him, but who had died suddenly, so that hope was extinguished.

"He wrote that he had no expectation or wish to live, but while able to write, and with a clear mind, he wished to state the incidents of his visit to his brother-in-law, Joshua Farnsworth, at 'My Lady's Manor,' which, with his many anxieties and insufficient food, had brought on the fever from which he was then suffering.

"In order to make his statement plain, he dated back to his boyhood in San Francisco, where he and his sister were the only children of wealthy parents who indulged them in every wish. He grew up without knowledge of business of any kind, his parents lost their property, and this was followed by their death.

"His sister married Joshua Farnsworth, who at that time lived in San Francisco, and at the age of twenty-one she died, leaving an infant son—Regi-

nald—whom Mr. Farnsworth placed in the care of a friend and left for Maryland and became owner of 'My Lady's Manor,' now your home.

"Archibald wrote that being without home or kindred—except his little nephew, Reginald Farnsworth—he left San Francisco for Philadelphia. At this point in his letter he implored pardon—as he had done many times before—for the elopement, and added that they had wandered about seeking employment, until compelled to remain in Baltimore owing to the ill health of his wife. They were reduced to want, when he heard incidentally that his brother-in-law, Joshua Farnsworth, was living here, and he walked from Baltimore to see him, ask for help and then return the same night. He saw Mr. Farnsworth at the post-office and walked with him to 'My Lady's Manor' and up to the seats upon the roof, where they could converse undisturbed. There Mr. Farnsworth agreed to take him back to Baltimore that night in his carriage and provide liberally for his family.

"He had scarcely finished speaking when he placed his hand upon his heart and fell back life-

less. The shock to Archibald was so great that for some time he sat motionless; then, realizing the danger to himself if found there alone, he resolved to escape from the house. When he reached the corridor he saw the open door in the wall of a back attic room. He crept through it into a meat room, closed it after him and went down a flight of steps and out a door which he locked and took the key, unconsciously. He walked back to Baltimore, where at the bedside of his wife he wrote the letter to Father De Cormis, closing it with a heartfelt petition for assistance, and taking all the blame of the daughter's disobedience upon himself.

"The letter was never mailed by him, for his wife died that night. The next morning he took Jerusha and Horace to the orphan asylum, then went to the hospital, where the letter was found upon his person."

"Does Horace Flint say that his father is yet living?" asked Hilda.

"Yes, but he has no home, but wanders about, his mind nearly a blank since his attack of brain fever."

"It surely is Archie, the Archie who saved my life!" exclaimed Hilda. "No one in the neighborhood knows his last name, for he has forgotten it."

"Horace mentioned that he sees him frequently, as did Jerusha, but without making themselves known to him. I think there is no doubt but he is the Archie you speak of; and, my dear, I am sure you will be surprised to know that Jerusha was the great-granddaughter of a French nobleman—the Marquis De Cormis. He was a noted officer in the French army, but owing to a sudden ebullition of temper was forced to flee from his native land."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Hilda. "I wonder if Jerusha knew it!"

"Yes, her mother told her of it in the letter which Jerusha sent to her brother Horace, and which Horace forwarded to Philadelphia. He also showed me a slip cut from a London newspaper of that date which gave all the details of the affair which made a refugee of the marquis."

"Do you know what it was?"

"Yes, my father-in-law told us of it a short time before his death, and we also found a full account

of it among his papers and those of the marquis, which he had kept. The substance of it was that the young Marquis De Cormis was at one time summoned from the frontier by his superior officer, and when he upon a dark, stormy night arrived at the tent of the officer, cold, wet, and exhausted from a long ride, he was severely and insultingly reprimanded for his delay in reaching there.

"The haughty spirit of the marquis could not brook the injustice from one whose social position was inferior to his, and seizing a boot which the officer had just removed, he hurled it at the head of its owner. It struck him upon the temple and he fell to the ground unconscious.

"The marquis rushed from the tent and with the help of his aides escaped to England, and from thence sailed to America, where he lived in the strictest retirement. He married in Philadelphia and my father-in-law was the only heir to the property in France, and to the title, neither of which he made effort to claim.

"In my father-in-law's will was a request that my husband should go to France and lay claim to the

property, and divide it equally between himself and Horace, which has been done."

The two ladies had walked slowly toward "My Lady's Manor" during the conversation, and upon reaching it found that Archie, who had come the evening before, was still there; and after Hilda had shown Mrs. De Cormis to her room she returned to have a chat with him.

"You have never told me your last name, Archie," she said gently as she took a seat beside him. "Every person has a last name, and it would please me to know yours."

"Archie forgets; he has tried, and tried, and cannot think," and a look of sad perplexity came into the worn face.

"Is it Flint? Archibald Flint?"

A gleam of glad recognition came into the eyes of the wanderer, and he clasped his hands in delight.

"That is it! Archibald Flint! Archie has never heard it since he had the fever. Archibald Flint! Yes, that is Archie's name."

From that time he made no effort to leave "My

Lady's Manor." He said he was tired of looking for people in the snow; he must rest. So he remained in that comfortable home, frequently saying to himself, "Archibald Flint! Yes, that is Archie's name," and the home of the one whose life he had saved was truly a haven of rest to his weary feet.

Lives of usefulness, peace and happiness were enjoyed by the Courtneys and their loved Mrs. Warfield; and Mrs. Ashley's prayer had, in God's own time and way, been fully answered; for Hilda was a consistent Christian, and her home and that of Sarah Warfield was one and the same.

THE END.